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Qualitative Analysis of International Student-Athletes in America and Transition into American College Sport by Using Hofstede's Model

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QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES IN
AMERICA AND TRANSITION INTO AMERICAN COLLEGE SPORT BY USING
HOFSTEDE'S MODEL

By

Jana Ajdukovic

A THESIS

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Abstract of a thesis at the University of Miami.

The purpose of this study was to understand international student-athletes in their process of adaptation upon arrival to the United States and their issues and obstacles they might face. It also aims to provide universities, schools, and coaches with insights on different communication approaches with international student-athletes. By adopting one-on-one interviews, this study offers important implications on how to best communicate with international student-athletes during the process of recruitment, as well as how to understand the "American" style of management or communication by using Hofstede's two dimensions; power distance and uncertainty avoidance and Hall's high and low context culture. The results also benefit prospective international student-athletes in the understanding of different communication styles in the United States and their potential hardships

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this paper, the researcher looked at the experiences and process of adaptation of international student-athletes in the United States by using Hofstede's two dimensions; power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) and Hall's high and low context culture (Hall & Mildred, 1987). The aim of this study was to understand the versatile cultures from the sample of international student-athletes and the ways that cross-cultural communication between students and the schools is utilized.

Athletes from all over the world have one dream to play a professional sport. They dedicate years and years of hard work and for many international student-athletes, playing collegiate sport is the first step towards their goal. Before starting their collegiate career, there is a long and dreadful process of recruiting where some international student-athletes have the first contact with the American culture and everything that comes with it. Unfortunately, not all of them make it to the desired level as they face many obstacles on their way. From language barriers, new environment, feeling of loneliness to unique sports culture and the pressure to fit in.

For the last 20 years, more and more international athletes are choosing the United States to pursue their professional and academic careers while looking for a brighter future. "There are over 17,000 international student-athletes enrolled and competing at NCAA schools" (NCAA.org, 2018). Their motivation is to get a free education while practicing in the best facilities in the world and receiving professional training from coaches. Another obstacle, the one much harder to describe and relate to is adaptation that international student-athletes go through in their process of moving alone

to a foreign country. Some international athletes indicated the high importance of understanding what are "getting themselves into" and what their life will look like once they arrive to the United States (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012).

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions of Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance

Geert Hofstede developed a model that describes the effects of a society's culture on the value of its members. In his book, Hofstede argued, "survival of mankind will depend to a large extent on the ability of people who think differently to act together" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Hofstede described how identities can shift over a person's lifetime, as that happens among many successful migrants. He provided an example of second-generation immigrants who identified with their countries of origin while they lived in the adoptive country of their parents. However, when they visit their countries of origin, they felt that they belonged to their new country (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 13). While explaining social norms, the Hofstede and his colleagues emphasized the meaning behind cultural relativism. "Cultural relativism does not imply a lack of norms for oneself, nor for one's society. It does call for suspending judgment when dealing with groups or societies different from one's own. One should think twice before applying the norms of one person, group, or society to another" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 19). Hofstede's original model was a result of the survey he examined in the International Business Machines (IBM).

During 1978-83, Hofstede conducted a study in one of the largest multinational corporations in the world, International Business Machines (IBM). Despite the nationalities of IBM's employees, the study found they shared and revealed common problems, but with solutions differing from country to country (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). While looking at the database and analyzing culture statistics, Hofstede

found clear patterns of similarity and difference along the four dimensions (Hofstede Insights, 2017).

Four dimensions discovered were named; power distance (from small to large), collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (from weak to strong) (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Power distance index (PDI) refers to workplace hierarchy and unequal distribution of power within the organization (Hofstede Insights, 2017). In organizations with higher PDI, employees seek approval from the higher power and often have no other choice but to defer to higher-level employees when it comes to business discussion. On the other hand, in lower PDI culture, there is limited or no hierarchical division of power in the organization (Mayhew, 2018). Meanwhile, Hofstede's theory about individualism versus collectivism describes two types of workers, independent workers compared with team-focused workers. In the work environment where employees' job performance depends simply on each employee's abilities and proficiency, both individualism and collectivism can occur within the same work environment (Mayhew, 2018).

Hofstede defined that societies in which masculinity is present have gender roles that are clearly distinct, where men are supposed to be "assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Those societies with femininity view believe social gender roles overlap; "both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)

The last dimension is uncertainty avoidance index, which refers to how comfortable employees are with changes at the workplace and uncertainties regarding their positions in the company (Mayhew, 2018).

This study will focus on two of Hofstede's dimensions, power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede described large power distance societies as the ones with centralized authority, autocratic leadership, large number of supervisors and acceptance that power has its privileges (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). On the other hand, small power distance societies are characterized by flat organizational structures, small proportion of supervisory staff and lack of acceptance and often questioning of authority (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Second dimension used in this research, uncertainty avoidance according to Hofstede can be weak or strong. Hofstede characterized weak uncertainty avoidance societies as risk taking, tolerating differing behaviors and opinions, flexible and with relatively low degree of structure and few rules. While strong uncertainty avoidance societies are characterized by avoidance of risk, lack of tolerance for deviants, respect for authority and need for planning (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Other researchers found Hofstede's work applicable in many different situations and manifestations of the culture. For example, some researchers used Hofstede's model when developing different advertising strategies for global markets. The model has been used to explain the differences between the concepts of self, personality, and identity which in turn explain variations in branding and communication strategies (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

Another study by (Builtjens & Noorderhaven, 1996) explored different dimensions and compared workers and organizational cultures in different companies. One of the findings showed how in western societies masculinity rate is lower compared to the rates in the Philippines. Moreover, all western countries except the UK score higher on uncertainty avoidance than the Philippines (Builtjens & Noorderhaven, 1996).

In the practice of public relations, researchers also used a comparative analysis using Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the impact it has on different cultures while practicing public relations. Kang and Mastin (2008), looked into the official tourist websites of over 44 countries, as they believed those are one of its most significant public relations channels when it comes to a wide range of audiences.

Kang and Mastin (2008) study showed the following:

> Countries with higher power index scores, such as e.g., Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and Taiwan, frequently used banner advertisements and complex design layouts on their tourism websites, as they appeared to believe that tourism is for special groups who have neither need for nor interest in promotional events such as free gifts and discount coupons. (p. 54)

> Moreover, the individualism variable also revealed strong differences across the countries' websites.

Kang and Mastin (2008) added:

> Humor appeal was the most powerful indicator of distinct differences when comparing individualistic and collectivist countries. Countries with higher IDV scores, e.g., USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, and France, used eye-catching elements to attract consumers such as animated quizzes/games and humorous videos. (p.55)

> In conclusion, researches agreed by using Hofstede's model, public relations practitioners can use it as a tool when targeting multicultural audiences. Furthermore, Kang and Mastin (2008) suggested "the importance of deciding whether to develop messages directed toward website visitors from the countries' cultural perspectives, or from the visitors' cultural perspectives" (Kang & Mastin, 2008).

Researchers in China analyzed how social media presents challenges and opportunities to multinational companies in crisis situations (Zhu, Anagondahalli, & Zhang, 2017). Using Hofstede's model and cultural context of individualism/collectivism, researchers agreed with China being a collectivistic society that stresses harmony and belongingness, and by using "We" identity carries a lot more weight than individualistic "I" identity in Chinese context (Kang & Mastin, 2008). Hofstede's dimension of collectivism was also explored in the descriptive analysis of the development of public relations in Taiwan (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001). Data was collected among 41 different public relations organizations, 23 respondents represented seven different Taiwanese-owned public relations agencies. Second, three respondents worked for two different international public relations agencies. Third, 13 respondents were from six different for-profit organizations. Finally, one participant was from the public relations department of a private university. The goal of this diversified sample is to understand how several different types of organizations in Taiwan practice public relations (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001). Results showed Taiwanese practitioners to be moderately high on individualism and collectivism, in the middle of the power distance index, a little higher than average on uncertainty avoidance, and very high on femininity and masculinity (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001).

These findings, along with the scores on the six models of public relations, identify a cultural approach to public relations in Taiwan (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001). A similar study was done in the United States, where the focus of the study was corporate culture, and the public relations communication of American practitioners (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999). The findings show that the American practitioners prefer managers who are flexible, are not afraid of disagreeing with their bosses, and desire and respect supervisors

who consult with them before making decisions (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999). The practitioners in this study appear to be more collectivistic than individualist in their attitudes and behaviors (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999).

Understanding of Hofstede's model is very important when looking at how countries with multinational cultures and nationalities communicate with their stakeholders in the public relations sector. For example, "multiculturalism in Singapore displays a blend of certain cultural hybridity, which is aligned with it being a multicultural cosmopolitan city that embodies Western modernity while retaining its Asian values" (Yeo & Pang, 2017, p. 120). This study's purposes were to understand how multiculturalism is operationalized and can influence in organizational communication in both individualistic and collectivistic societies (Yeo & Pang, 2017).

Some cultures might have different approaches and implications of public relations in their culture. For example, in Arabic countries commitment to a group such as a family, extended family, or extended relationship override most other societal values (Ali-Kandari & Gaither, 2011).

Ali-Kandari & Gaither (2011) explained:

> In a "weak uncertainty avoidance" context such as a Western culture, people, to a great extent, people are capable of coping with change. In these cultures, society promotes being adventurous and risk-taking. People in "strong uncertainty avoidance" cultures, like the Arab culture, prefer the conventional sets of rules and structures. (p.267)

Hall's High versus Low Context Culture

In addition to Hofstede's model, this research uses Hall's high and low context culture theory. In his theory, Hall and Mildred explained how each culture operates based

on its own principles and own lows (Hall & Mildred, 1987). According to Hall, communication can be divided into three parts; words, material things and behavior. Moreover, communication can have high or low context. In his book, *Beyond Culture*, Hall defines high context communication that is in person, explicit and without needed coding of the message. A low high context communication is usually not in person and needs explaining (Hall & Mildred, 1987). In the explanation of the low and high context culture, Hall defined the cultures of high and low context.

Hall's and Mildred's (1987) study found the following:

> Japanese, Arabs, and Mediterranean peoples, who have extensive information networks among family, friends, colleagues, and clients and who are involved in close personal relationships, are high-context. As a result, for most normal transactions in daily life they do not require, nor do they expect, much in- depth, background information. This is because they keep themselves informed about everything having to do with the people who are important in their lives. Low-context people include Americans, Germans, Swiss, Scandinavians, and other northern Europeans; they compartmentalize their personal relationships, their work, and many aspects of day-to-day life. Consequently, each time they interact with others they need detailed background information. The French are much higher on the context scale than either the Germans or the Americans. This difference can affect virtually every situation and every relationship in which the members of these two opposite traditions find themselves. (p.27)

To conclude, Hall's concept suggests that individuals combine preprogrammed culture-specific context and information to create meaning. Previous studies looked into

the high/low- context cultures and Hofstede's power distance. A study by Richardson and Smith (2007) discussed the influence of high/low-context culture and power distance comparing Japanese and American students and their choice of communication with their professors. Based on previous results, Richardson and Smith (2007) categorized Japan as high context culture and the US as a low context culture. Their analysis revealed that American students and Japanese students differ in choosing communication media to contact their professors. Specifically, American students rated E-mail as significantly more likely to be used, compared with Japanese students. Yet, Japanese rated face to face communication, telephone, fax, and letter as significantly more likely to be used than did American students (Richardson & Smith, 2007). Another study looked into the promotions on social networks sites in China and in the USA (Liu, 2013). Study tested if cultural factors play an important role on social network sites, taking in the consideration different cultural values, high/low context cultures and individualistic versus collectivistic society (Liu, 2013). A study suggested there is a lack of research that focuses on how social network sites are used in low and high context cultures (Liu, 2013). Moreover, this study supports that high-context cultures used more emotional expressions to promote movies than low-context cultures (Liu, 2013). In context of this particular research, this study provides suggestions how coaches and schools could and should communicate with the students depending on their native cultures and cultural contexts they are used to.

To sum up, previous research agrees culture is a significant variable that affects public relations (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999). With using Hofstede's model, the researcher analyzed the data by using two dimensions; power distance and uncertainty avoidance in order to effectively answer the research questions. Secondly, the researcher used Hall's low high and low context culture in order to decode results of the interviews. This study

gives an insight of how the schools (messengers) can be more effective in their communication with international student-athletes, as well as get the better understanding of their culture and needs.

Recruting

When it comes to recruiting prospective student-athletes, there are various factors that come into the equation. Being a good athlete is not the only factor that is important to recruiters and coaches. "The long-term success of any intercollegiate athletic program begins with recruitment of outstanding student-athletes that display both academic and athletic acumen" (Judson, James, & Aurand, 2008, p.24). Researchers Judson, James and Aurand (2008), considered the priorities of prospective student-athletes when selecting a college or university and the differences in those priorities based on gender and ethnicity. Results showed student-athletes prioritized entering schools that they trust and will develop them as both students and athletes.

One of the things that makes American coaches reach overseas for the talents is dedication and hard work international student-athletes bring to the programs off and on the court. "American universities have found that they need a boost in the representation of foreign-born students in their science and engineering programs because on some levels the country is lacking in those areas of study in primary schools" (Stewart, 2013, p.257). Even though recruiting of international athletes can sometimes be more difficult because of the special regulations and NCAA rules, coaches are still reaching out to international prospects. According to Ridinger and Pastore (2000), one of the main reasons why American intercollegiate athletics programs support international recruiting is because they want the best players that are out there no matter their origin. Moreover, another factor

that might influence recruiting international student-athletes is pressure to win and build the best program (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000)

Another advantage of international recruiting came with the usage of the Internet to gather information about international players which helped coaches get easy access and convince when looking at recruiting players from outside the country. Internet and social media have made it easier for coaches to communicate with and track talent for international prospects to find appealing athletics opportunities in the United States (Mooradian, 2015; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). As most videos and recruiting materials can be found online, there are still some students who reach out to their friends and family as source of information in their recruiting process.

Moreover, studies that involved international student-athletes show that many of the respondents indicated family, friends, and acquaintances that had competed in the U.S. college system were more important sources of information about playing opportunities at NCAA schools than were the coaches whose job it is to recruit these athletes. This study illustrates the need for coaches to be more effective and efficient while recruiting the international athletes. (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012). In contrast to domestic athletes who take official and unofficial visits and have many other opportunities to develop relationships with coaches who are recruiting them, international athletes rely on their personal support system (i.e. club coaches, former athletes, family, friends) to gather information on U.S. colleges (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012). After all, what really matters is what each player is bringing to the team as that benefits not only the athletic department but also to the university as a brand. The benefits of a successful athletic program go far beyond the athletic field of competition and transcend numerous aspects of university operations and reputation (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).

When it comes to uncertainty avoidance and research that has been done on correlation of uncertainty avoidance. Previous research indicates the positive correlation between the scores and playing in front of the home audience (Dennehy, 2017). Study by Gelade (2015), focused on home advantage (HA) in correlation to the performance of the athletes. In his research, Gelade researched soccer players and he found players have the tendency to perform better when they are playing on their home ground than when playing away (Gelade, 2015).

 In other words, based on the previous research, it comes to the question of possibility if international student-athletes perform not as good as expected because of uncertainty avoidance of being in a whole another environment.

Why Choose the United States?

Many ask what is so special about the American educational system that makes tens of thousands of international students each year pursue their degrees in the United States. In some cases, international students traveling thousands of miles across the world represent the hopes and dreams not only for themselves but for their family, extended family, village, or town (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012). A study by Pierce, Popp, and Meadows (2012) discussed how respondents overwhelmingly indicated that both the facilities and opportunities were better in the United States. In general, new international students will confront a world that is often quite different from their own (Dorsett, 2017). One of the things America has that most other countries around the world do not, is the privilege of playing sports and competing against other universities. Many countries are lacking educational and athletic aspect that the United States is promising to prospective international student-athletes.

According to Mooradian (2015):

England is one of the few nations offering competitive sports as part of the education system. Most foreign countries' athletics systems are based on the club and professional models and those who participate do so with a professional sports career as their primary goal. (p. 2)

For most international student-athletes, playing college sports and getting their education at one of the best schools in the world is close to their definition of the "American Dream" (Stewart, 2013; Hoffer, 1994; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Furthermore, not every country has high-level institutions with high rankings in the professional and business world. McMahon (1992), emphasized the lack of opportunities for students who showed interest in advanced degrees and there was no promise of advancement that education should provide. In her research, McMahon explored the power of education in the United States and connection to increasing numbers of international students in the United States. McMahon's (1992) study showed:

Records indicate that in 1960, there were nearly 238,000 international university students worldwide; within fifteen years, this figure had nearly tripled. Now more than thirty years later, the number of foreign students in the United States alone exceeds 400,000. (McMahon, 1992). (p. 470)

In addition, Pierce, Popp and Meadows (2012) came up with interesting questions for international student-athletes:

Do all these students get what they dreamed and hoped for upon arrival?" Do their expectations meet reality and everything that was promised to them during their recruiting process? American college sports programs provide an opportunity for international athletes to continue their playing careers and educational training

where high-level athletic facilities and strong competitive opportunities abound.

(p.12)

For the international student-athletes, transition to the United States involves not only the typical academic pressures facing first-year college students but also managing their rigorous athletic schedules and adapting to their new identities as temporary residents in a new country.

Rights of International Students in The United States

Another important aspect of studying in the United States are the rights of international students and visa regulations and violations. In the F1 visa policies and legislation handbook, there are multiple criteria that need to be met before getting an F1 visa and I-20 form which secures entry to the United States (F1 visa policy- Foreign Students in the United States: Policies and Legislation, 2008).

International students must be accepted by a school that has been approved by the Attorney General and they must document that they have sufficient funds or have made other arrangements to cover all their expenses for 12 months of their stay (F1 visa policy- Foreign Students in the United States: Policies and Legislation, 2008). They must demonstrate that they have the scholastic preparation to pursue a full course of study for the academic level to which they wish to be admitted and must have sufficient knowledge of English (or have planned with the school for special tutoring, or study in a language the student knows) (F1 visa policy- Foreign Students in the United States: Policies and Legislation, 2008). Once in the United States on an F visa, nonimmigrants are generally barred from off-campus employment (F1 visa policy- Foreign Students in the United States: Policies and Legislation, 2008).

In previous research, many international students expressed their discontentment regarding the employment and rigorous restrictions to working while studying in the United States. Again, once in the United States on an F visa, nonimmigrants are generally barred from off-campus employment. Exceptions are for extreme financial hardship that arises after arriving in the United States and for employment with an international organization (Haddal, 2008). F visa students are permitted to engage in on-campus employment if the employee does not displace a U.S. resident. Another reason why international students might reconsider choosing the United States to further their education is the strict criteria for prospect employment opportunities. "The stagnant U.S. economy has shrunk the available pool of financial aid for graduate students and lessened students' prospects of finding good jobs in the United States after they earn their degree" (Mooney & Neelakantan, 2004, p.41). Looking at all the facts, studying in the United States is a big privilege that only high-income families can afford for their children. Previous research confirmed the fact that in the end the international student cannot rely on on-campus work as being a part of their financial support while studying in the United States, as the only thing they can do is look good at their financials before making the decision of studying in the United States.

Acculturation

The freshman year in college can be very hard on any student as they become accustomed to the new curriculum. For many it is the first time living on their own, making their own decisions and being a responsible adult. In addition, international students are facing even more challenges when it comes to the new culture, language barriers and academic differences. A study by Eunoyoung (2012), designed an alternative theoretical model examining psychological identity development of international students in the

United States. The data was collected from international undergrad students at large public institutions. The proposed conceptual model, International Student Identity (ISI), consists of six phases: pre-exposure, exposure, enclosure, emergence, integration, and internationalization (Eunyoung, 2012). This model emphasized the little attention that has been focused on issues of identity development of international students. In the future, this model could be used to develop international student service programs and help international students in need in their transitions in the new environment.

When talking with the international students about how they feel in their first few months, they often use a word culture shock. Rodriguez (2014) explains how the use of the term "culture shock" is widespread among international students. He argues how culture shock is nothing more than an attempt to describe the difficulties that individuals encounter when making the transition from one culture (their own, or one to which they are familiar) to a different one. There is no doubt any transition and feeling of an unknown can be hard for any person in any age, the loss the person is feeling is related to the cultural differences to which the individual is exposed (Rodriguez, 2014). Other researches explored the support and resources American universities offer to their international students.

Garcia & Villarreal (2014) in their study explain the importance of support for international students:

> Many colleges and universities lack international centers or counselors dedicated to advising international students. International students have unique needs. For instance, many may need support in developing their English oral and writing skills. Institutions that do not provide English immersion or do not create a supportive environment through an international center hamper students' campus

involvement, which could lead to attrition and ultimately also negative reviews to prospective students and their families. (p.130)

Furthermore, when it comes to cultural differences it is very hard to immediately follow the "norms" of the new culture that international students come across. "The differences among foreign students as individuals, even among those from the same country, are considerable. The individual is still unique and defines generalization" (The Morality of Foreign Students in America: Morality of Foreign Students, 1961, p.8). International students, like every American student, is an individual before anything else and takes different approaches when it comes with his home culture and also when it comes to the process of acculturation. According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary (11th ed.), acculturation is the cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture. The findings noted "Americans in the university community are likely to find most Indian Hindus 'very different', Arab Moslems 'too strict', Turks and Latins 'too lenient' in such behavior as drinking (The Morality of Foreign Students in America: Morality of Foreign Students, 1961, p.78). Eventually, all first-year students no matter their origin have to go through the same process of getting customized to the new college community and find their comfort as they adopt new identities and roles.

Problems of International Student-Athletes

Packing bags and saying goodbyes are certainly the easier parts of the transition to the American culture. What really makes the international experience harder is adjusting to the new and unknown environment where students are introduced to the new set of unknown challenges and struggles.

Dorsett (2017) explained:

While the academic challenges may be some of the most immediate and obvious, understanding the campus culture and more generally U.S. cultures will also require international students to embark on new experiences and re-examine previously held expectations (p.12).

Furthermore, international student-athletes and their transition to the United States involves not only the typical academic pressures facing first-year college students, but also managing their rigorous athletics schedules and adapting to their new identities as temporary residents in a new country (Stribling, 2018). Many international student-athletes must learn about the U.S. education system, establish a different mentality, and adapt to a unique student and social life.

Social life is what makes college experience more fun for any student where they are expected to live "the best years of their life." But for some international students, the transition may not come as easy as they thought. Making friends with U.S. students can be difficult for international students. The initial friendliness of U.S. students can be confusing for international students when, after initial encounters, the friendliness does not lead to a deeper friendship. In general, many international students tend to create stronger connections with other international students, because they feel that U.S. students do not understand them (Aydinol, 2013; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2014). In those situations, what really matters is the support system that the university, coaches and teammates are providing for those international students.

According to Pierce, Popp, and Meadows (2012), international students emphasized one of the most important elements of adjustment is a strong support system from teammates and coaches and from friends and family in their native countries. Sato, Hodge, and Burge-Hall (2011), researched the difficulties international student-athletes

faced at an American Historical Black Colleges or Universities. The research came up with common topics that were brought up by international students such as marginalization, language barriers and dueling agendas.

Sato, Hodge, & Burge-Hall (2011):

> The international student-athletes were generally anxious about potential miscommunication with teammates, instructors, peers, and administrators. Most of them lacked confidence to ask questions about things they did not fully understand (e.g., NCAA regulations, class lectures, assignments, and exams). (p.17)

Even though the results were somewhat obvious and expected there are still interesting points of view only international student-athletes have experienced and can describe. In the research by Sato, Hodge, & Burge-Hall (2011), participants prioritized their academic progress over their athletic goals, while still valuing their athletic scholarship as that brought the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics while developing their professional skills (Sato, Hodge, & Burge-Hall, 2011). As other findings, this research confirmed a different aspect and correlation between academic and athletic roles of international students compared to American student-athletes and their view of education and sports carriers. International student-athletes prioritized academics over athletics, as according to the NCAA rules they have to maintain a minimal GPA governed by the NCAA to compete (Sato, Hodge, & Burge-Hall, 2011). Another important factor for international student-athletes is the question of potentially staying in the United States upon graduation and the chances of getting employment. Often international student-athletes have different goals and objectives that go beyond athletics, such as earning a higher GPA, working toward a professional career, or obtaining US citizenship (Sato, Hodge, & Burge-Hall, 2011).

Lastly, a big portion of struggles for any international student can be finding the funding's if the athletic scholarship does not cover all the cost. For student-athletes, the process of proof of financial support is the same, but it varies on athletic scholarship offers they receive. A full scholarship satisfies proof of financial support, but in any other case, for example of partial scholarships, student-athlete must show proof of other support covering the difference. If the scholarship amount changes, unless the student-athlete has other funds available, s/he risks being in violation of the visa (Mooradian, 2015).

Life of Student-Athletes

The schedule of a regular student may seem sometimes hectic and stressed, but when it comes to practices, meetings, game tapes, workouts, community works and much more, support for the student-athletes from their teachers, coaches, friends, and family becomes crucial. A study by Chen, Snyder, and Magner examined the effects athletic participation can have on college students. In the study, they surveyed 163 student-athletes and 112 non-athletic students from all the NCAA Division-I level institutions. The results reported that there is a "special status" being associated with being a student-athlete, since many participants appeared eager to associate with the role. On the other hand, "33% of athletes reported being perceived negatively by professors and 59% by the students" (Chen, Snyder, & Magner, 2010, p.186). Even with those high numbers, participants of the study did not seem to be affected by the opinions from their peers and professors, as they still had a healthy and proper perspective of their athletic role and did not see sports as the only important part of their lives. In this case, the survey was conducted in the institution of the lower Division I level, which also might have a big impact of the results, as it is not so typical student-athletes from this conference/school become professionals after finishing their education. With that said, if the survey was conducted in a high ranked D1 school

that usually sends off their athletes to the pro leagues, answers and views of roles of student-athletes could drastically change that perspective.

In their book Etzel, Pinkney and Ferrante discuss the issues student-athletes may face in their college experience and address the importance of professional counseling services for student-athletes. "Traditionally student-athletes have been raised in an environment that stresses the importance of resiliency and self-reliance" (Etzel, Ferrante & Pinkney, 1991, p.20). Another interesting aspect that book is researching is social sigma about college athletes fear of jeopardizing their images of "heroes" if they go to counseling and ask for help (Etzel, Pinkney, & Ferrante, 1996). As previously mentioned, athletes are often the "faces" of the university during their time representing their institution on the highest level while dealing with their private issues on a daily basis and still delivering on the court. It should be a priority for schools and coaches to take care of their student-athletes as in the many situations that is not the case. "Universities frequently act under the assumption that the individual athletic programs will handle issues and concerns of athletes" (Etzel, Pinkney, & Ferrante, 1996, p. 22).

Researchers Hon and Grunig (1999), discussed how universities look on representation of their student-athletes and they image in the public, which then helps them measure how well an organization presents itself to others and the amount of attention or exposure that the organization receives (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In their research, they also found key elements of long-term relationships; control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship.

When looking at the way's schools are targeting their prospective students, researchers believe with new technology there is a new way schools are getting in touch with their prospective athletes (Berry & Bass, 2012). What differentiates Generation

Y/Millennials from the older generations is their communication pattern, as many scholars describe them as high-maintenance, collaborative, contract-minded, technology-expert, accustomed to communication on demand, and crave affirmation and instant feedback (Berry & Bass, 2012; Greenwood, Gibson, & Murphy, 2009). Research findings indicated when in communication with college students, there is a potential danger of assumption that researchers know what will work because they were once college students (Berry & Bass, 2012). This research can also be applied to this particular research as there is a possibility of assumption from the side of schools/coaches/recruiters who believe they have a good understating of student's behaviors and general norms.

By knowing the influencing factors of student-athletes when it comes to decision making on their recruiting process, schools and coaches have a better understanding of student-athletes needs and expectations. In previous studies, students indicated the most important factor is the coaching staff (Vermillion & Spears, 2012). Other important and highly rated factors include personal relationships, financially based reasons, and academics/ career development. The least important factors included media-related issues, technology outlets, and past coaches (Vermillion & Spears, 2012). Furthermore, recently it has been discussed the importance of families and their involvement during the recruiting process.

According to Wolken (2017):

While there's nothing unusual about parents being key parts of the support structure for recruits, it was only last April that the NCAA changed a rule allowing schools to finally pay for parents to accompany their children on official visits. (p.7)

In many cases, families became a relevant factor that has a big influence over student-athletes and their decision. There is a specific bond that needs to be made,

especially in situations with four, five-star recruits who have a big interest from schools from all over the country.

Universities Benefiting with International Students

As previously mentioned, international students are not the only ones benefiting when it comes to the education and "without question, as international students studying in American institutions provide many benefits for the U.S. They increase the diversity of student populations, add new perspectives to classroom conversations, and, related, increase awareness and appreciation for other countries and cultures (Lee & Rice, 2007). In order to prepare workers for these growing challenges, research on business communication has pointed to positive benefits from international internships for developing not only linguistic skills but also understanding appropriate sociocultural behaviors (Moody, 2014).

Davis (1997) explained the international employment and befits:

As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and employers seek qualified employees who thrive in foreign environments and understand cross-cultural contexts, it is not surprising that education with an international focus is becoming integral to the success of individuals, organizations and nations. (p.17)

Furthermore, as time is passing, revenues of multinational corporations are exceeding the GDP's of medium-sized nations (Abrahamse, et al., 2015), which means more and more students with international educational background are desirable on global market-place. In addition, research indicates studying abroad brings positive aspects and the creation of globally aware, sustainability conscious citizens (Abrahamse, et al., 2015). Educational experiences abroad affects individual perceptions about host nations, which in turn impact the success of critical activities, such as trade and diplomacy. Nations that

invest in the promotion of international education and incorporate the industry into their national agenda will reap myriad economic and social benefits (Davis, 1997).

In a survey conducted by Webb et al. (1999), international executives ranked the ability to manage cross-cultural communication as the most important quality of successful workers, implying that workers in today's multinational corporations must have the ability to connect to other societies, cultures, and people. (Moody, 2014). Cross-cultural communication is happening on a daily basis in many corporations around the world, where employees are forced to adjust and talk to their colleagues and work in teams with people from diverse backgrounds and mores. Research by Vercic, Zerfass, and Wiesenberg (2015) reviewed international public relations practice in the corporate sector. Results reveal "nearly, all CCOs in European corporations (more than 90 percent of them) experience international communication as a part of their daily business and nearly a quarter of them regularly work with 20 or more countries" (Vercic, Zerfass, & Wiesenberg, 2015). Other researchers reported that working in multicultural teams is common practice nowadays and that employees interact with colleagues and customers of a number of different nationalities and corporate and organizational cultures routinely (Vesala-Varttal & Varttala, 2010). Moreover, researchers find the most challenging part of practicing international public relations understanding of other cultures in corporate culture. Based on results researchers believe diversity and international experience are keys for recruitment and composition of communication professionals in corporate headquarters as well as in decentralized communication teams (Moody, 2014; Vercic, Zerfass, & Wiesenberg, 2015).

As a solution, researchers suggested international companies have to establish international training initiatives for communicators as well as an international selection

process for communication staff (Vercic, Zerfass, & Wiesenberg, 2015). Morever, encourage international exchange of best practices and creative approaches in corporate communications between countries, regions, as well as divisions and functions, and establish a visible international communication performance within the company (Vercic, Zerfass, & Wiesenberg, 2015).

Practicing public relations in any culture can be very challenging and sometimes hard to teach and learn. What could make it easier is having teams of various cultural backgrounds that can adjust and be more open-minded when it comes to interaction with other cultures. "Diversity
among employees in terms of cultural background leads to a richer, more sophisticated and more effective corporate environment" (Olaru & Herlemann, 2008, p.48). Other researchers also agree the more diverse the staff, the easier is to communicate and have transparent communication and trade. The workplace is becoming a rich environment for communicative interaction in which people from diverse backgrounds navigate the challenges of establishing their social positions and identities (Moody, 2014). Today, certain companies and corporations are specifically searching for people with a different cultural background, as different experiences and cultural lifestyles are bringing benefits and additional soft assets to the companies (Olaru & Herlemann, 2008). Moreover, companies that have multicultural employees have a better chance of building their company and success around it. Companies that have staff from several cultural backgrounds can give the chance for each culture to remain independent to a certain extent, or they can try to build up an own company culture, which ideally reflects parts of other cultures (Olaru & Herlemann, 2008).

Other studies looked into the way colleges and universities are employing Twitter. Study used a content analysis of sample of 133 institutions. "It was found that institutions are not employing Twitter in a dialogic way and they are, instead, employing it primarily as an institutional news feed to a general audience" (Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012, p.636). Moreover, results indicate that the majority of universities' Twitter accounts are directed towards a general audience.

Linvill, McGee, & Hicks (2012):

> Out of 1130 tweets, 1007 (89.1%) were directed toward a general audience, 54 (4.8%) were directed towards prospective students, 69 (6.1%) were directed towards students, 18 (1.6%) towards faculty, 19 (1.7%) towards alumni and 54 (4.8%) towards parents (p. 363).

Previous studies have already researched the issues of international student-athletes but have not looked into the cultural dimensions of it. Using the Hofstede's model, this research looks deeper into the connection of the cross-cultural communication with the adaptation process of international student-athletes.

Previous research indicates that cultural differences may play a crucial role in influencing the strength of team identification (Gau & Kim, 2011). Furthermore, team identification is a phenomenon in sports spectatorship that is probably associated with attitudes toward spectator sport. The more positive one's attitude is, the more likely it is that the person will develop a strong level of team identification (Gau & Kim, 2011).

In terms of research methodology, most of the prior research were quantitative research that used methods of surveys and questionnaires. With in-depth interview, this research brings another perspective and insight of cultural differences and understanding of American culture in eyes of international student-athletes. To fill the gap and offer

literature reference for future studies, the present study has collected the responses of 15 international student-athletes via interview by asking the following research questions:

RQ1: Why are international-student athletes choosing the United States for their education?

RQ2: What are the culture shocks international-student athletes are facing in the United States?

RQ3: What are the communication styles of American universities and specifically American coaches?

RQ4: Is there a bigger power distance present in American teams between the coaches and the player, as well as in the team compared to other cultures?

RQ5: Did American universities and coaches provide information or support for international student athletes to assure their choice of the university and reduce the perceived risk/uncertainty?

Chapter 3

Methodology

This research looked into the adaptation process of international student-athletes to American culture and American lifestyle. As a former international student-athlete, I wanted to find out experiences of other international student-athletes and their process of adjustment. I want this research to help the next generations of international student-athletes to feel more prepared prior to their arrival in the United States. Nevertheless, this research will also give an insight to coaches, advisors and university administrator for future communication with prospective international student-athletes.

In this study, I collected the data by interviewing 15 international student-athletes (Appendix A). The reason why this study used in-depth interviews and not surveys like similar studies (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012) was because I wanted to hear the stories of the students and get connected on a more personal level.

As a researcher, I decided to use the interviews as a method as I believe personal experience and cultural differences cannot be measured accurately with quantitative research. On the other hand, talking directly with student-athletes gives the participants the chance to share their individual perspective and specific context and conditions which contributed to how they feel and think. Every participant had their own story they shared of firstly how they ended up in the United States and their experience so far.

Student-athletes were recruited via e-mails, messages and through word of mouth. Generally, they were introduced to the topic with the recruitment message (Appendix B). I made sure participants were familiar with the topic and interested in sharing their experience in the United States. All participants signed the liability waiver (Appendix C) and also had the option of not answering the questions if they did not want to do so.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntarily and _{participants} did not receive any compensation,

I interviewed 15 student-athletes from 11 different countries including (Croatia, Netherlands, Serbia, Canada, Spain, Poland, Macedonia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Germany, and France).

All participants met the pre-described conditions studying in the United States, being an international student-athlete and getting an athletic scholarship. Out of 15 participants, 6 participants were males and 9 participants were females. Participants were competing in NCAA Division I; Atlantic Coast Conference, American East Conference and Big 12 Conference. Interviewees were part of basketball, volleyball, swimming and diving, baseball, tennis and rowing teams. There was a big important factor in decision of interviewing only Division I athletes as they have variety of restrictions and rules that are not represented in Division II and Division III schools.

Names of participants are fictional to protect their identity. Data gathered for this research was stored in a personal computer and was not available to anyone else but me. In the process of defining the themes and common answers, I did not use specific software for decoding. The interviews were composed of questions related to participants' process of adaptation and adjustment to American culture. All interview questions in this study were developed based on addressing the research questions. Understanding the international student-athlete experience and new life in the United States while using Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's low and high context cultures.

Name	Gender	Classification	Sport	Country	Age
Pete	Male	Junior	Swimming	Croatia	23
Helen	Female	Senior	Basketball	Netherlands	22
Annie	Female	Senior	Basketball	Croatia	23
Giselle	Female	Senior	Volleyball	Serbia	23
Bob	Male	Sophomore	Tennis	Macedonia	20
Connor	Male	Senior	Baseball	Canada	23
Jeffery	Male	Senior	Baseball	Canada	23
Mia	Female	Freshmen	Swimming	Spain	19
Gabi	Female	Freshmen	Rowing	UAE	19
Mike	Male	Senior	Basketball	United Kingdom	23
Kate	Female	Junior	Rowing	Poland	21
Lora	Female	Sophomore	Rowing	Germany	20
Tina	Female	Sophomore	Basketball	Croatia	20
Fernando	Male	Sophomore	Tennis	Spain	20
Vivian	Female	Junior	Rowing	France	21

Table 3.1

Chapter 4

Results

Reasons to Study Abroad

All participants talked openly about the reasoning behind leaving their country and taking on a new adventure in a new one. I was interested in finding out the factors that made them chose to study abroad, and in particular the United States. That set of questions focused on the decision of coming to the United States and their focus on the academic or athletic part when choosing the right institution. Participants were all very clear on their reasoning behind study abroad. All 15 participants emphasized the level of sports in the United States and unique opportunity of playing and studying at the same time, which in majority of countries is not possible.

While looking at the results three reasons appeared to be most common for the participants to leave their home countries; no system of playing sports and getting an education, better opportunities and new experience.

Helen (22, Netherlands) had a dream of playing basketball on a higher level than what was offered in her home country. While choosing the school she looked into the quality of the teams and the records. It was important for her to be in the best team that could give her a push into her professional career after college. She also mentioned how there is no such thing of going to college while at the same time playing sports.

Helen (22, Netherlands):

> I have always played basketball and I just always wanted to go to the next level. After high school I was like; well the best thing you can do after this is to go to America, study and play basketball because, at home that is not really a thing, we don't have a college with a college team, so that is kind of how I got here.

> Everything around basketball is so much bigger here, I don't think any time soon Europe is going to live up to that, so. On the other hand, it would be nicer to stay closer to home.

As previously mentioned, 'most foreign countries' athletics systems are based on the club and professional models and those who participate do so with a professional sports career as their primary goal (Mooradian, 2015).

Bob (20, Macedonia) had a plan of going pro after graduating high school, unfortunately, in his junior year, he suffered a severe injury and was out of the court for almost a year. The plan of going pro fell through at that time. While playing national tournaments across the world he got noticed by a lot of coaches and scouts who offered him an athletic scholarship. Bob admitted he had no idea of the American system of college. After talking with potential coaches, he made a decision of coming to the United States and getting a college degree even though that was not his original plan. He compared the sports level to his country and the opportunities he has in the United States.

Bob (20, Macedonia):

> I felt the opportunities here are way bigger and wider. I felt the practices that I had in Macedonia were not as good as the practices that I have here. The coaches were not that good or the players I was playing against. Here I have 10 players that I have a really good practice with every day, and I compete against 10 great players each practice. That was a key reason why I came here.

In the interviews, all participants emphasized the level of professionalism and opportunity for improvement every single day. Tina (20, Croatia) compared the conditions she had in her "professional" club team in her home country to the one on college in the United States.

Tina (20, Croatia):

What you see in America is professionalism, you always have access to the gym, you have 6 coaches working with you. If you need help with developing your game, someone is always here to help you. There is always time for you to stretch, to go to therapy. In Croatia, we have one coach on the team, and we have limited time in the gym. We share our gym with multiple clubs and organizations. On the other hand, in America, you can always enter the gym on your own, whenever you want.

Kate (20, Poland) had a different story than the most participants, she came to United States as an exchange student her junior year where she got the chance to get more involved with rowing and get familiar with American system of college and sports.

Kate (20, Poland) described American system as:

Better organized with possibility of connecting sports and studying. What got me to come here is a possibility of connecting college and sport, which is not possible in Europe, since everyone just focuses on academic and sports are just put as a second or third thing you do.

Giselle (23, Serbia) explained the difficult economic situation she has in her country. She believes there is not a lot of perspective for young students and athletes in Serbia and that is the main reason why most of them are leaving the country, with the hope of having the brighter future somewhere else.

Giselle (23, Serbia):

My main reason to study abroad was the economic situation in my country. There is not a lot of perspective for students. A lot of students and athletes are trying to go study abroad because they know that will bring them more options after they graduate. In terms of looking for a job and working in other countries. I choose the United States because, in my opinion, they have the best program the way they

have combined sports and education at the same time which we don't have back home. Back home to finish university is much harder than here, so I would probably need to stop playing volleyball just so I can manage to stay on track and manage my time. I came to the United States because here I can do both.

For both Connor and Jeffery, students from Canada, the United States was an opportunity to get an athletic scholarship and get their education paid for. Even though Canada has a similar system of connecting college with sports, it is not as nearly competitive as in the United States, moreover, student-athletes do not get scholarships based on their athletic abilities. Connor explained; "the main reason why I came here is because I got my school paid for which was not an option in Canada."

On the question of would they stay in their own country if they had the same opportunity to study and to play the sports, participants had split opinion. Out of 15 participants, 8 participants said they would stay in their own country if there was a league similar to NCAA and the school system was similar to the one in the U.S. 2 participants said they would maybe consider staying in their own country, while 5 participants said they would still choose the United States over staying and studying in their home country. Gisselle (23, Serbia) talked about the positive sides of leaving her country at such a young age and starting her new life across the world by herself.

Giselle (23, Serbia):

Now that I am here, I don't regret coming. I enjoy meeting new people and other cultures. Also going away from home when I was 19 years old by myself is also a huge thing. Just to live on your own is a huge thing. Even if there was a league similar to NCAA back home, I would want to come here because I am that type of

person that likes to experience other things, see how other people live, other
cultures, and I go for the best opportunity that arises at that moment.

Moreover, what makes the United States more attractive than any other country in
the world for prospective international student-athletes is the unique level of sports culture
that has been around for years in the United States. All participants reported how more
people are involved in the college sports and response of the fans in the stands.

Helen (22, Netherlands) expressed her surprise on how many people are taking care
of one team. She mentioned how back home there is one coach for the whole team, while
on the other hand in the United States, on the college level there are 10 people committed
to the team. She also said how much more competitive and developed college leagues are
compared to the Netherlands in Europe in general.

Helen (22, Netherlands):

The highest division back home has like 7 teams, and here you have over 300 teams
and that is only Division 1, and that is not even with WNBA. Just like facilities
and coaching staff. They have 10 people of coaching staff hired just for us. Let
alone, all the security people, people behind the table, social media. So many jobs
around one team. They have as many people going on a trip with us as how many
players are in the actual team. Back home, we have one coach and he doesn't even
get paid for it.

Moreover, other participants also expressed the sports culture being completely different
from what they experienced in their home countries. In the United States, college players
are seen as stars, often under the media spotlight and watched by the public at all times.

Bob (20, Macedonia):

How much people in the United States pay attention to the college athletes is crazy. Last year when we traveled for tournaments the stadiums where we played were full. Not to mention football matches, all the football players are students here, but they are seen as "stars". People come and wait for them after the games to take pictures with them. Hard Rock Stadium was full every game they played. It is really incomparable to Macedonia.

Annie (24, Croatia) described differences in approaches and sports culture especially when it comes to women's basketball which is not as near popular in Croatia as it is in the United States.

Annie (24, Croatia):

Looking from the female basketball player point of view, it is really different. American sports are so professional even though is a college a level, it is still more professional than the professional league in Croatia, and people are more interested in women sports in general, unlike in my country.

Annie pointed out the problem of no promotional activities for the teams and interest of public and the community in involvement with the sports, even when it comes to the "professional" level of basketball.

Annie (24, Croatia):

The marketing here is also very good for the games, they have all these media exposures where they are trying to expose the players to the community and in that way, they create the bond, so people come and watch and support us in the games. In Croatia it is very different, we don't have anything like that. People don't even know when we have our matches.

Culture Shock

Previous research showed how most international student-athletes that come from non-English speaking countries find the language barrier as one of the first culture shocks upon their arrival in the United States (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012). Participants recorded different answers to their "cultural shock" in the United States. One of the participants mentioned language being the first culture shock in her adjustment in the American culture.

Helen (22, Netherlands) described:

> The first thing that shocked me that everything was in English, that was rough. Not that I didn't speak English, just everything went so fast, and with that all of my teammates were black, so they also had some kind of slang and I couldn't really understand. I had no idea what was happening, it seemed like they were speaking a whole another language.

> Some of the participants mentioned food as being one of the main things that makes them miss their home. Bob (20, Macedonia) explained how he was used to a healthier diet back in Macedonia, he discussed the quality of food that is much worse than in his home country.

Bob (20, Macedonia):

> The biggest thing I don't like about here is food, especially last year since I was living on campus, and I was eating in the dining hall, the food was terrible. I gained 15 pounds in 2 months. But now this year is better since I am living off campus and cooking my own food, but still if I can choose one negative thing about here is definitely food. I live in a village in Macedonia and all I eat is homemade, our own meet, our own vegetables, fruits. When I came here, I tried the tomatoes and they just taste plastic.

"The adaptation to food was really not easy," said Lora (20, Germany), she expressed shock around fast food chains which are available on every corner.

Lora (20, Germany):

> You can find McDonald's and Wendy's everywhere, we don't have that culture of fast food, and here is just easy to eat "junk food". People here are always in a rush so they always order some fast-food, something on the go. I was kind of expecting it but didn't expect to drive on the road and see one fast food chain by another. I was kind of scared of gaining weight also because the first thing you see when you go to the dining hall is fries, burgers, pizza…

While most participants focused on the food quality, Mia (Spain, 18) described a shock she experienced in just food schedule and eating habits. "The eating schedule for me was the first big shock. In Spain, we eat lunch at around 2,3 p.m. and here they eat at noon, home we eat dinner at 9,10 p.m. and here around 5.6. p.m." (Mia, Spain).

Other participants mentioned personal relationships being one of the biggest shockers they experienced in their process of adjusting to American culture. Majority participants described the relationships and friendships in America by using the word "fake". They were surprised by the first impression as Americans being very friendly and nice, but as their time in America progressed, they found American students as not being genuine. Giselle (23, Serbia) explained how people have a different type of friendships and relationships in Serbia.

Giselle (23, Serbia):

> I just think where I am from people are friendlier, and they express emotions much more freely. I also think people back home are more open to listening to others. I

am very emotional, and I get very attached to people around me, and I just don't

see that here.

Gabi (20, UAE) agreed with her and continued "my friends back home are like my family and I never had that here, you know a lot of people but you don't have a real relationship with them" (Gabi, UAE). Mia (Spain,19) also spoke about "coldness" and distant relationships between people, she added; "people in Spain are also more warm and friendlier, here everyone is so distant" (Mia, Spain).

On the other hand, other participants were shocked by the friendliness and how people communicate with people that they do not know, participants also felt as people were showing "fake" interest when they actually had no intention of starting the communication with them in the first place. Bob (20, Macedonia) explained how people in his country do not communicate with people that they do not know.

Bob (20, Macedonia):

It was my first day here, and people were just asking me out of nowhere; "How are you?", "How are you doing?", "Do you need help?". I am not used to that. In Macedonia, if you say that to someone that you don't know, they will look at you like you are crazy and probably ask you back - "why are you asking me that?".

Kate (21, Poland) added "how people interact was very shocking to me, they just say hi to you, but they don't really care. You just say; "What's up?" and keep walking. That was weird for me" (Kate, Poland). Most participants agreed that communication style and approach to people in the United States was one of the things that they found most different in comparison to the communication and relationship/friendship culture from their native countries. When talking with Canadian participants, they answered how they did not experience the usual culture shock they believe other international students go

through in their process of adjustment. Although they did mention differences in the lifestyle and environment. Jeffery (23, Canada) was shocked with freedom of guns and people's rights to demand protection for themselves.

Jeffery (23, Canada):

> I was shocked with gun control. Especially here in Pittsburg, last semester there was a gun rally two blocks from my school. There were hundreds of people walking around with automatic rifles claiming they need protection. In Canada we have guns only for hunting purposes.

Communication Styles in America

I was interested in looking at how cultural differences may or may not have an influence on communication styles. The second part of the question was focused on the relationship between the coaches and the players and the way they felt while in open face to face communication.

Participants had different stories of how they ended up in the United States. For some of them, the United States has always been a dream, while for others it was just a plan B. While talking about communication styles with American Coaches and American universities, participants noted similar experiences. In the description of the communication, they used words; professional, friendly and promising. I asked participants to compare communication styles of American coaches with communication they had with coaches in their native countries.

Some participants started their recruiting process through the agencies which were involved in their initial communication with the coaches and recruiting coordinators at the universities. Other participants posted their profiles on scouting pages themselves where

they were contacted by recruiters and coaches. All participants were included in direct communication with the coaches and university administration.

Most interaction started through e-mails and Facebook chats where coaches would directly initiate the communication with prospective athletes. After some time when both athletes and coaches were interested, they started using other channels of communication. Chatting over text messages, FaceTime and Skype.

Helen (22, Netherlands) story started in a different way than the most participants. She was a member of the national basketball team where she was introduced and exposed to recruiters and scouts who were looking for prospective international athletes interested in competing in the United States. Another coincidence Helen had was that the assistant coach of her national team was a basketball coach at Syracuse University, who then introduced her to the collegiate system off basketball in the United States.

Helen (22, Netherlands)

> Because I was on a national team, and I was competing on the European Championships, there were scouts there, so I was on the scouting websites, and coaches could easily find me. So that is how I got some of my offers, but the funny part is that my current coach at college in the United States was USA National team coach for team under 19. We played them in the National Championship, but also the Syracuse coach was our assistant coach on the National Team, so I had many contacts, and I just narrowed it down to 3 schools and went for visits. If I wasn't recruited, I really don't know if I would have end up in America, I really never thought about it.

On the other hand, the majority of participants took the initiative and created the profiles on the recruiting sites that are connecting American coaches and prospective athletes. Many of them said the coaches would be the first ones to reach out to them, while others send actively their recruiting videos to the particular schools they were interested in. Gabi (20, UAE) described communication as very persuasive; "I find them very easy to talk to. They try to get you in. They are very proud and show off, they show you this perfect picture that sometimes is not so realistic" (Gabi, UAE). Kate (21, Poland) explained her recruiting process. Communication between her and the coaches was consistent, but it got more hectic as the date when she needed to make her decision was approaching. "At the beginning, we talked like every two weeks, but when we got more into recruiting, we basically emailed back and forth every other day. The closer it got to the signing period, the more intense communication was" (Kate, Poland).

Jeffery and Connor, two participants from Canada expressed how communicating with the coaches in the United States was easy and very similar to the communication they had with their coaches back home.

Connor (23, Canada) continued:

> I was on the travel baseball team in Canada so that made my recruiting process much easier. During the Spring we had different tournaments across the U.S. where we got the chance of playing in front of the college coaches. Sometimes coaches would approach to me right after we would finish the game and we would exchange contacts, or they would reach out to my club coach and ask about my information. In general, I think my process and communication was much easier than for any other international student-athlete, no.1 reason English being my native language.

Gisselle (23, Serbia) was one of the participants who directly contacted the schools she was interested in. "I was reaching out to the coaches, sending out my videos and my personal information and if I would get a response, we would engage in more communication." Vivian (20, France) described communicating with American coaches as a little bit "too much".

Vivian (20, France) said:

> I would say they were overly engaged. But this is just America, like when you meet someone for the first time; they are like OMG I love you. Like no. Take a step back. Ok, it was not like that with coaches, but in America, they are just over carrying, now I got used to it, and it is fine, but at times it was just a little bit too much for me. I am just a little bit shy and quiet.

Participants that hired agencies first talked to their agents that were hired to find the schools that were interested in them. After the coaches wanted to find out more information about the athletes, agents would share their information with the coaches and recruiting coordinators at the universities. Annie (24, Croatia) described how her recruiting process and communication was a little bit different. She was not a part of the national team and therefore had a difficult time getting interests from American coaches, later on, she found a recruiting agency that she hired to help her in the process.

Annie (24, Croatia):

> There was a professor in my college back home who was giving an informational session about how the college system works in the U.S. Later I found out this professor has an agency that connects you with the coaches, they are the 'middle

men' in your process of recruiting. I pretty much paid the agent that then connected with me different schools and coaches.

Mia (19, Spain), Lora (20, Germany), Kate (21, Poland) and Pete (23, Croatia) all had a similar experience working with the recruiting agencies. Mia said; "They had put my profile on the recruiting website so the coaches could contact me. The coaches that were interested would send me an email and I would FaceTime and asked them all sort of questions" (Mia, Spain). Pete (23, Croatia) explained the process of negotiating and intensity of the communication which was depending on his interest in the school, as well as the coaches interests. "I think the intensity of the communication depends on their interest. Some of them would call me 2-3 times a week, while others would maybe call once every two weeks, just to check on me" (Pete, Croatia). Pete described communication with American coaches as more genuine and coaches being interested in all around well being of the athlete; "I would say American coaches are more friendly and open to talk about anything, which I found very positive. Coaches in Croatia just care about how you preform" (Pete, Croatia). However, Fernando (20, Spain) talked about the other side of recruitment and difficulties in communication that occurred when negotiating the terms and financial opportunities and obstacles.

Fernando (20, Spain)

> Some of the coaches didn't care about financial communication of my family which I found sometimes kind off rude, because if they want me to come and swim for the school they are supposed to understand. They just expected more than I could afford and did not want to cooperate in lowering the price or give me some other way to earn the money.

When it comes to asking questions in their recruiting process with the coaches, some participants noted how they sometimes did not know how to ask questions about more sensitive topics such as financial packages schools were offering.

Kate (21, Poland) said:

> Often you don't want to ask uncomfortable questions like; "What kind of scholarship are you willing to offer me?", "What would be a reason I should come to your school?". Especially since English is not my first language, that was a big barrier while trying to get all the information you need, but regardless if you are American or Non-American athlete is hard to ask those type of question at the age of 18 someone who is above you.

> Gabi (19, UAE) agreed and continued; "I didn't want to be too pushy while trying to get more information. I was always very careful when answering the emails, I didn't want to sound rude or pushy" (Gabi, UAE). Lora (20, Germany) talked about misunderstanding she had with the coach in recruiting process where she said coaches in the U.S. often don't always understand the financial situations of the international student-athletes.

Lora (20, Germany):

> When I arrived in the U.S., they told me they would take $5000 off from my scholarship, which really made me mad. Because they did not understand how much money is that for someone coming from my country and living standard, but quickly after that, we discussed this matter and resolved the problem.

> In general, international student-athletes experienced a little bit different communication with American coaches in their process of recruitment.

Power Distance

When it comes to the relationship between the coaches and the team and the way communication is handled inside of the team, participants shared different opinions. Some participants believe the quality of communication and closeness with the coach depends on the personality of players and how they approach the relationship with authority, while other faced fear in their communication because of the power distance between the team and the coach. All participants agreed that the American style of communication practiced in the teams was very professional and on a higher level than what they have experienced in their home countries.

Bob (20, Macedonia) expressed how there is big respect between the coaches and the players in the U.S. Coaches that were at his university before his arrival were much friendlier with the players, but because of that they were not taken seriously he says. He continued "there is respect that needs to be shown to the coach, he is above everyone".

Kate (21, Poland) added:

> There is not much communication going on, you do as you are told. Come to the practices, come to the events, figure out your schedule and just be there". The communication back home was a little bit more open and honest. Here they just expect to do it all. Even though they say we are students first then athletes, athletics still always come first.

Tina (20, Croatia) explained:

> Being a Division I Basketball coach in America is almost like a social status. In Croatia is so different, no one even knows who they are, even the coaches that are

in "big name teams", they just don't act like that. In America coaches just act differently.

Lora added; "In general head coaches here are admired, like when we go on a trip, our coach doesn't even carry her own bag. That shows you how much she is respected" (Lora, Germany). Connor (23, Canada) also shared an opinion about how coaches are important figures but explained why he thinks coaches act the way they do.

Connor (23, Canada):

Coach has to have more to say than the players. They have to keep that mentality where they are the boss and you are an employee. I think that a is kind of approach that is a necessary evil, I think if a coach was super personal with the players they wouldn't see him as authority, and a lot of people would take advantage of that. They have to act this way to get players in order. It's kind of dictatorship, what I say it goes, it is not questioned.

Helen (20, Netherlands) also found an American style of communication as more professional and intense. She explained how for coaches in the U.S. coaching is their only job and not just a hobby, there is so much on the stake for them.

Helen (20, Netherlands):

In the U.S. it is way more intense than back home, this is actually their life. If they are not coaching us, they are recruiting other people. Back home basketball and coaching it is just a hobby, and that is a big difference. They are more intense here because there is much more on the line for them. If we don't play well, it is directly

going to reflect on them. Back home it is if you played bad, you played bad for yourself.

Giselle (23, Serbia) explained how she did not see a big difference in communication between coaches in the U.S. and back home. "I wouldn't say it is a big difference. It is just a matter of respect. You know you are an athlete and that your coach is above you. Sometimes coach can make a decision you don't like, but still, he is your coach" (Giselle, Serbia). She also believes how communication between the player and the coach mainly depends on the personality of the player and how they approach the coach. "I always had a good relationship with my coach where I could openly tell him what I don't like and we would together find the solution that would help the team and me" (Giselle, Serbia).

Even though she did not come across any misunderstanding in the communication with the coach, Giselle said she was more concerned about her performance as she was a scholarship athlete versus being in Serbia and playing for fun. "At home, I never had a communication issue, or I didn't have the need to express my opinion because nothing was depending on me. Here this is my job. It is expected to me to do the best I can" (Giselle, Serbia). Helen also agreed with Giselle and said the relationship and closeness of the coach and the player depends on the personality. "I always get close with my coaches, that is one of the main reasons why I chose UM, because if I don't respect you then I won't take anything from that person. I would also say it is more intense here, we travel much more" (Helen, Netherlands).

Bob (20, Macedonia) as previously mentioned had a plan of going into a professional career right after high school, due to his injury he was forced into taking a different route to his dream and started his recruiting process. His current college coach

knew him from his first tennis days in Macedonia where they traveled together on the tournaments. Bob said that was one of the reasons he chose the University of Miami in the first place. "I feel comfortable talking to my coaches because we come from the same culture, we speak the same language" (Bob, Macedonia).

Bob was comfortable with the coaches and knew committing to play for them would be a good choice for him. He explained how at times he felt homesick and lonely, but since his coaches are from the same part of Europe and had a similar background, he was opening up to them about his problems.

Bob (20, Macedonia):

> I stayed here for winter and I had a hard time during Christmas time because no one was on campus, you just practice every day all day. I was very homesick and feeling down, but then I talked to my coaches, and because they were in similar position as me when they were young they can relate to me and how I feel at the times.

Not all the participants had the best experience and understanding when it comes to communication with coaches. Both Maria (19, Spain) and Annie (24, Croatia) had a hard time communicating and expressing their opinion with coaches. Annie expressed how she sometimes feels scared talking with her coach, fearing her reaction. She said; "She has these meeting with us and she would always tell us before what kind of questions she will ask us so we can come prepared. I am just always scared to say anything because I can never predict how she may react" (Annie, Croatia). Annie compared relationship and communication she has with her coach in the U.S. to coaching and communication from back home.

Annie (Croatia, 24):

On Division I level you really have to be professional in your approach to the coach. In Croatia, I was really close to my coach. We were more friends rather than coach and player, and in the U.S. your coach is your boss. You always have to be careful what are you going to say. Some of the players would joke with coaches, but I was always scared because I never knew how she would react to my sense of humor so I rather stayed distant than talked to her openly.

Maria (19, Spain) shared Annie's opinion and also had a barrier in communication with her American coach. She said; "I don't have that much confidence to talk to the coach here like I had back home. In Spain, I would go and talk to him about anything, but here I have to be more careful what to say because it such a professional environment" (Maria, Spain). Maria and Annie agreed on how coaching, in general, is more professional and serious in the United States.

Maria (19, Spain):

Here communicating with coaches is more distant but also more professional, in Spain you are talking to the coach more like a family member. Coach back home was always friendly with us, always joking and fooling around us, sometimes he would get mad but he was also always carrying. Here is more professional, I am your coach, we practice together and that's it. I really can't even compare it.

Gabi (20, UAE) also shared a closer relationship with her coaches in UAE:

Back home I was very close with my coach, he was almost part of the family. It was very family oriented, the whole team culture was different. Here I see my coach at practice and I never see her again. If I need to see my coach here, I could probably go to her office, but I never do that.

On the other hand, Lora (20, Germany) did not experience communication problems with her coach but said; "I don't have a problem with my coach, but we do not have a close relationship" (Lora, Germany).

Bob (20, Macedonia) expressed what helped him to avoid communication issues, was a similar cultural background he shared with his coaches, him coming from Macedonia, and coaches being from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though his coaches have European roots like him, he still believes they adopted the "American" way and style of communication. "People here are more official and not as friendly as my last coach back home. I like the professionalism here, they inquire a lot of hard work which I like and I really enjoy working with them" (Bob, Macedonia).

Another aspect that was being considered while measuring power distance was a hierarchy in the team itself and how international student-athletes saw relationships between the teammates in the team. Majority of participants expressed how they experienced hierarchy and sort of division in the team of upper classmates and underclassmen. Participants noted before coming to the United States they did not have a similar experience in their teams back home, they described players as all "equals".

Tina (20, Croatia) said:

> Seniority here is really a thing. Like back home you have a captain, and they were there basically just to talk to the refs during the games, and here is like captains have to do so much more things and the pressure is so much bigger.

Connor (23, Canada) as being a current senior explained:

> I think there is definitely a division. That mentality; we are seniors, and this is how we run things. Freshmen kind of do whatever we tell them to do. I think it would

be even worse if our school and the team was bigger, people there get hazed and they are part of the same team, it's crazy.

Bob (20, Macedonia) added:

Freshmen's respect us more, we have a rule in our team the freshmen's pick up the balls during the drills, also there are some things freshmen's have to do it. I did it last year, now the freshmen's do it. It is a little bit weird, I ask myself what is the point, we are all on the same team. I think it to myself it does not matter how old you are, if we have to pick up the balls, we should all pick up the balls.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Participants recorded different opinions about uncertainty avoidance they felt about universities and their new life in the United States. I was interested in looking into how coaches represented the programs, schools, and environment that international-student athletes would be exposed to once they arrive in America. Another aspect that was looked into were surprises and unexpected problems that may or may not have occurred after arrival in the U.S. students were not aware of. According to NCAA regulations; any visit to a college campus in which any part is financed by the school is considered an official visit. Coaches usually save invitations for their top recruits (NCAA.org, 2018). Helen (20, Netherlands) was one of the three participants that got the opportunity to visit the school on an official visit before signing the National Letter of Intent.

Helen (20, Netherlands):

When I was on a visit, they didn't show me the dorms where freshmen live in, they showed me the nice dorms, that is what we do now too with new recruits too (laughs). Of course, they try to portray the perfect picture. They show just parts of

the practice; the team hanging out. But I think that's all the school do that, they treat you like a queen when you come for a visit.

On the other hand, other participants which did not get the change of visiting the campus and getting the better idea of what kind of life they could expect, said a lot of them had friends that were already studying in the United States that helped them answer the questions they had.

Annie (23, Croatia) said she was well informed prior to her arrival:

> I received multiple brochures and contact information of all the people that I might be needing once I get to the United States. I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting myself into. I think they have a pretty good support system for athletes and people that inform you. In my school, we have advisors specialized for international students, and assistants in that office had an answer to my every question.

Bob (19, Macedonia) admitted how he was not prepared for his arrival. He said it was partially his fault as he did not ask many questions. Even though he also got the chance to visit the campus, he said some of the problems that arisen once he arrived were things he would never think of.

Bob (19, Macedonia):

> In the academic part, I was surprised in my first semester. My English was not as good, I was really struggling. Sometimes I wouldn't understand what the professor was saying. Secondly, in my high school, we were always handwriting everything and here everything is on the computers. First ever class here, everyone was on their laptop or iPad's, and I had a notebook and pencil my mom bought me back in Macedonia. Then I went to my advisor and asked him: "Do I need a computer?",

and he said: "Of course you need the computer. That's how you do your homework." That was the first time, I heard about the Blackboard and a school email.

Pete (23, Croatia) agreed and mentioned how he may not got the full picture of what his life would look like once he was in the U.S.

Pete (23, Croatia):

Coaches always talked about the best stuff at the university, but no one ever mentioned the negative sides that you are going to face once you are there. And I think it would be important to mention that to the future athletes before coming to the U.S.

Kate (21, Poland) also agreed with Pete and said how she did not get the most realistic picture of what college life would look alike.

Kate (21, Poland):

Coaches sugarcoated everything, of course, they said there will be some hard work, but everything that they were presenting was just so perfect and beautiful. I wish they told me how hard it is being a college athlete, practicing twice a day and still going to school and studying. I would still come here regardless, but I would definitely be more mentally prepared for it.

Pablo (20, Spain) remembered how things were not so easy at the beginning; "I came here and I needed a new bank account, new American phone number, just a lot of things, a lot of documents, things that I never thought about" (Pablo, Spain).

In her recruiting process, Lora (20, Germany) did a lot of research on her own so she felt well prepared for her arrival; "I was doing research on my own because I was

comparing all the schools together before making the decision, so I was well informed to what can I expect" (Lora, Germany).

Vivian (21, France) said how she did not expect such a big team; "when it comes to the rowing, I am used to the smaller teams, I didn't expect us to be so many of us" (Vivian, France).

Gisselle (23, Serbia) made sure she was well informed prior to coming to the United States:

I knew some information about what to expect since some of my friends were already studying in the United States, so I kind of knew what to expect. I was asking them a lot of questions, talking with people that were in a similar position like me helped me a lot. It was really important for me to know everything, if you are coming all the way across the world, you want to make sure you choose the best school for yourself. I looked at the rankings in NCAA and if they had other international players on the team.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

By analyzing interview transcripts of 15 international student-athletes, this study found that international student-athletes in the United States have a hard time adapting to the American culture in aspects of two Hofstede's dimensions; power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Also, by using Hall's high and low context culture, this research looked into the different communication styles in particular countries. Based on the results of this study, university administration, coaches and American student-athletes need a better understanding of other cultures while engaging in communication with international student-athletes. Berry (1997) discussed how in order to understand someone's cultural background we should compare where is person originally coming from and where is it trying to settle (Berry, 1997).

In the situation of coaches communicating with international student-athletes, it is very hard for coaches and university employees to be aware of and educated on all the different nationalities and cultures prospective international student-athletes are coming from, but it is encouraged for them to respect and value other cultures.

According to Hall and Mildred (1987), "first naming in the United States is an artificial attempt at high-contexting; it tends to offend Europeans, who view the use of first names as acceptable only between dose friends and family" (Hall & Mildred, 1987, p. 17). Some of the participants described American coaches and administrators as "overfriendly" and very open which in most cases was an unusual type of communication for the European participants in the study. Canadian participants did not mention any differences in the communication but moreover similarities in how they communicate with officials and higher power authorities

One of the reasons why international student-athletes have a hard time understanding the "American" way of communication is because as previously researched, many messages have a cultural meaning which is deeply rooted in the context of the communication. On the other hand, Hall (1975) emphasizes how messages come in many forms (most of them not in words) which makes it hard for international student-athletes to understand before they get synced with the "American culture".

Based on the results and participants answers, we can say cultural differences can often create misunderstanding and even uncomfortable situations where both sides are not familiar with what is expected from them and what are the norms in the particular culture. Even though adaptation to a new environment can differentiate from student to student and their own process of adjusting to the change, participants expressed similar obstacles they faced in their acculturation. While students can somehow influence on some of the adjustments they have to do, such as taking extra classes of English at their home countries and preparing themselves to different types of food, they cannot predict the relationships and interactions they will have once they enter the United States. Making friends with other international students tends to help in the process and gives a way of stability and feeling they are not alone in here and there is someone else going through this experience with them.

Moreover, cultural changes can range from "relatively superficial changes in what is eaten or worn, to deeper ones involving language shifts, religious conversions, and fundamental alterations to value systems" (Berry 1997, p.17).

Coming to the United States for many international student-athletes is a unique opportunity to study and to play the sport they love, and eventually, for some go into the professional sport after graduation. Studying in the United States, away from home can

also be a big burden a lot of international students may face in their process of adaptation. A lot of questions and insecurities may arise, such as, whether or not their English language skills are good enough, how will I develop meaningful friendships and etc. (Dorsett, 2017). Furthermore, it has been researched how some universities in order to assist incoming international students have developed special programs and strategies to help them in their process of adaptation. Some of these strategies can include mentoring programs that are connecting international and U.S. students and give them a support system international students may lack in the first months of their arrival (Dorsett, 2017).

One of the suggestions I would have for universities is uniting and connecting international students as much as possible. Results recorded that participants who were in close relationships and interaction with other international students had a better support system and feeling of belonging compared to the students who were just interacting with other American students.

After reading and comparing the results, I found a lot of interesting and helpful insight information international student-athletes shared in their interviews. When it comes to the main reason why international student-athletes are choosing the United States over any other country in the world, the answers were obvious, United States is one of the few counties and for some sports the only country in the world that offers athletic scholarships.

According to Lewter (2015) U.S. college system is the only system that specifically develops track and field athletes aged 18-22 (Lewter, 2015). Therefore, as nothing is looking like it is going to change in other countries any time soon, despite all the difficulties they may face, international student-athletes are still going to continue chasing their dreams in the United States. One of the things coaches and administrations staff cannot influence or "educate" prospective international student-athletes is the culture shock most

participants expressed in their interviews. In previous studies, researchers looked into the transition of international students in the U.S. and culture shocks they face in the new learning situations (Pierce, Popp, & Meadows, 2012; Stewart, 2013; Hoffer, 1994; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Most international students feel the need to adopt the host culture as a new way of life, while on the other hand conflict arises in an individual when the realization surfaces that there are dissimilarities in cultural values from an individual's home country and the host country. This conflict is often characterized by high levels of uncertainty (Rodriguez, 2014).

Participants recorded a variety of culture shocks from the language barrier, food to communication between the people and relationships in general. As previously mentioned, Rodriguez (2014) argues how culture shock is nothing more than an attempt to describe the differences individuals face when making the transition from one colure to a different one. Taking this in the consideration, I would still say it is much different when an individual is changing their culture when they have family with them such as an example of immigrants who with the change of environment but still have the opportunity to bring a part of their tradition and cultures with them. Secondly what makes this transition so hard for international students is the fact they are leaving their homes at the age of 18 years old, which is a very delicate period. At the end I believe another hardship is the fact that in any case of an emergency they have no way of going back to home or someone coming to them without taking the airplane and spending hours before getting home.

For international student being in the United States and being mostly surrounded by American students and their "lifestyle" is usually very different from what they were used to. In describing communication and relationships in general, participants agreed that they see relationships and friendships, even day to day communication as very shallow.

Participants described their relationships with friends from back home as much tighter and sincere in comparison to their current friendships with fellow American players and students in the United States.

When it comes to communication patterns of international student-athletes and recruiting process, this study supports the previous findings where with new technology coaches have a lot of different ways to find potential recruits and communicate with them in many different ways. Generally, coaches use E-mails, Skype, Face Time, phone calls, Facebook and Tweeter. The goal of the coach is to get to know the international athlete, their personality and if they fit the athletic program. The coach also promotes his/her school, their athletic program, and familiarizes the international athlete with the campus and resources that will attract them to choose their school (Jara, 2015).

When talking about power distance the majority of participants agreed on different relationships between the teammates and coaches in comparison to what they have experienced in their home countries. After analyzing results from the international student-athletes, I used the official Hofstede's website to get the data about the participant's countries and their power distance index and compared it to this research results. The only country that does not power distance index available was Macedonia, therefore I could not use the data for this comparison.

As previously discussed, Hofstede defined power distance index as the measure for the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). According to Hofstede, high power distance index indicates that hierarchy is clearly defined and present, while on the other hand low index indicates a less rigid authoritarian system where members of the social challenge authority or readily interact with authority

figures to make decisions. From the interviews, participants discussed different team cultures and relationship they have established with their coaches, as well with the other team members. Even though a majority of participants agreed the main factor in the relationship between the coach and the players depends on the characters, participants also noted their experience differentiated from the one back home.

One of the interesting parts was a comparison of coaches and relationships between the coach and player by Canadian athletes. Connor explained how he believes in order for American players to have respect towards their coaches they needed rigorous distance from the coach and not the friendly approach. Even though looking at the power distance index in general of Canada and the United States is similar, Connor still believes American college athletes are much different in their behavior than international athletes. Interestingly, both Croatian and Spain athletes despite the relatively high power distance index compared to the one in the United State stated, their relationship with coaches back home were much closer and they experienced a much higher power distance with their coaches in the United States.

The participant from UAE also agreed how coaches in her country were part of the family and in the United States relationships are much more professional although PDI for UAE according to the data is 90 compared to the United States PDI of 40. The rest of the power distance indexes are presented below (Appendix D).

Overall the results of this research show due to the multiple factors, of cultural differences, language barriers and different relationships in general, international student-athletes have a much harder time starting an open communication with their American coaches compared to their coaches in their home countries. In order to resolve this problem and lower the power distance between the coaches and the international student-athletes,

international student-athletes should have a more open relationship with their coaches and be afraid of stating their opinion and asking for help. Also, in order for student-athletes to be more comfortable with their coaches and university officials, they should initiate weekly or monthly meetings with the student-athletes in order for giving them feeling of support and safe place.

When it comes to the second Hofstede's dimension uncertainty avoidance, while half of the participants recorded how they were well-informed by the school officials and their coaches. The rest of the participants agreed how they were not fully aware of what their "new life" and experience in the United States would look like. According to Hofstede, uncertainty avoidance indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). This dimension focuses on how cultures adapt to changes and cope with uncertainty. Emphasis is on the extent to which a culture feels threatened or is anxious about ambiguity (Hofstede Insights, 2017).

Results indicated that some of the participants prior coming to the United States, asked questions and avoided uncertainty, while the majority of participants admitted they were scared of asking "too" many questions even though they were eager to find out more information. Taking this into the consideration, we can conclude that if participants were communicating more openly with their coaches and asked more questions, uncertainty avoidance would be even lower than what the data indicated.

Overall this research was designed to get a better understanding of communication between the university officials and international student-athletes, as well as looking for common issues international student-athletes face in their adaptation process. When recruiting an international student-athlete, you are not only accepting him or her as a player

but also his culture and all the differences that might come with it. In order for international student-athletes to feel more comfortable in the new environment they need support. Firstly, from the one person that assured and convinced them of coming to their school, their coach. The results show the pattern where the coaches seemed very friendly in the recruiting process, but as soon as the athletes are in the United States relationship became very professional and distant. This change triggers a lot of questions and even a fear towards the coaches. As a suggestion, while head coaches still might keep the bigger power distance from the players, there should always be at least one part of the team staff that has a warmer relationship with the players and brings the comfort. Communication and support are keys to a mutually respectful good relationship that will help both universities officials, as well as student to adapt in the new situations. In order for international student-athletes to bring their best performance they need to feel welcomed, it is a two-way-street of mutual understanding, respect and professionalism.

Chapter 6

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations associated with this study. Firstly, the sample size was small due to the limited time of the research. Secondly this study only included Division I athletes, and the results could be different if the next research involved Division II athletes, as they may not have the same financial support from the schools and less restrictions when it comes to traveling and committing to the athletic programs. The sample of this study included a small portion of Division I athletes and their perception of culture shock, adaptation process and communication patterns that may be very different when talking with participants from other schools with smaller programs and bigger international student base. For the future research, it will be important to bring diversity in between the sports, as well as gender and look into the correlation of result between the major Division I programs and bigger school in comparison to smaller Division I programs where the sense of belonging could differentiate on the size of the school and community.

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Appendix A- Interview Questions

General Questions

What is your country of origin?
What school do you attend?
What sport do you play?
How long have you been playing your sport?
How old are you?
How long have you been in the United States?
What was your main reason for studying abroad?
From all the countries why did you chose the United States?
Would you consider staying in your country if there was a league similar to the NCAA?
Were your goals set on academic or athletic part?
Can you name the biggest "culture shock" you came across so far?
What American "tradition" you found the most "odd" and different from your culture?
How does the sports culture differentiate in the United States compared to your culture?

RQ1: What are the communication styles of American universities and specifically American coaches?

RQ2: Is there an "American" style of management or communication?

     a. What was the main style of communication you had with American universities and coaches recruiting you?
     a. How often were you contacted and by who?
     a. Did you experience any differences in communication with the universities and schools compared to the your culture and communication styles?
     a. Was there any misunderstanding in your communication with universities and coaches because of your cultural differences?
     a. Is there a big difference between how you communicate with coaches in your home country and the way you communicate with American coaches? If yes, please explain.
     a. Was there ever a time where you felt uncomfortable with the style and type of communication? If yes, please explain.
     a. How would you describe the communication style of American universities and coaches?

RQ3: Did American universities and coaches provide information or support for international student athletes to assure their choice of the university and reduce the perceived risk/uncertainty?

Do you believe the recruiting communications prepare you for a well-informed arrival to America.

   a. How important was it for you to know as much information as possible about the recruiting universities and coaches?
   a. Did you talked to the potential teammates to get a better idea of what to expect and gain more insight on the university and the team?
   a. Describe how planned and organized was your process of communication with the universities and coaches?
   a. Describe any fear of an unknown and different culture?

- RQ4: Did the international student athletes have a sense of belonging to the American team?

   a. Was the sense of belonging important for you in the process of adjustment in America?
   a. Do you feel like you were equal part of the team even though you were an international player?
   a. Are you more focused on your own achievements and developing your skills, than goals of your team?
   a. Have you ever felt isolated from the team based on your cultural background?
   a. Please describe your relationship with your American coach and team?
   a. Please describe the similarities and differences of the culture of your American team and your team back home?

Appendix B. Interview Request

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. XYZ,

My name is Jana Ajdukovic, and I am a graduate student at the University of Miami majoring in Public Relations. I am currently working on an academic research on experience and cultural adaptation process of international student-athletes in the United States and I would like to get a help from you. You being an international student-athlete and sharing your first-hand journey and all the obstacles you had on your way, can help other students feel more welcomed and speed up the process of adaptation. Furthermore, universities, coaches and staff will get a better understanding of other cultures and gain insight into communication skills that be embraced in the future.

I am writing to ask if you could share your experience by participating in an interview at your earliest convenience. It will take about an hour for the interview. Upon your permission, I will send you more details about the research. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me either by e-mail: jxa940@miami.edu or by telephone: (305) 298-9510. Thank you so much for your kindness. Looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Kindest regards, Jana

Appendix C. CONSENT

The following information describes the research study in which you are being asked to participate. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked if you agree to participate.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this study is to understand international student-athletes in their process of adaptation upon arrival to the United States and their issues and obstacles they might face, as well educate universities, schools and coaches in different communication approaches with international student-athletes.

PROCEDURES:

You are being asked to complete an interview at a place convenient for you. It will take about an hour. The conversation will audio recorded with your permission. You will be asked about your personal experience as a student-athlete and your process of how you were recruited and communication with universities and coaches.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS:

We do not anticipate you will experience any personal risk or discomfort from taking part in this study. During the interview, you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If you feel uncomfortable being audiotaped, it can be turned off at your request.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All of the papers pertaining to the study will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and all electronic data will be stored in computer files. Only people who are directly involved with

the project will have access to those records. When the project is finished and results are reported, no individual will be identified in any way.

RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to say no or leave the study at any time.
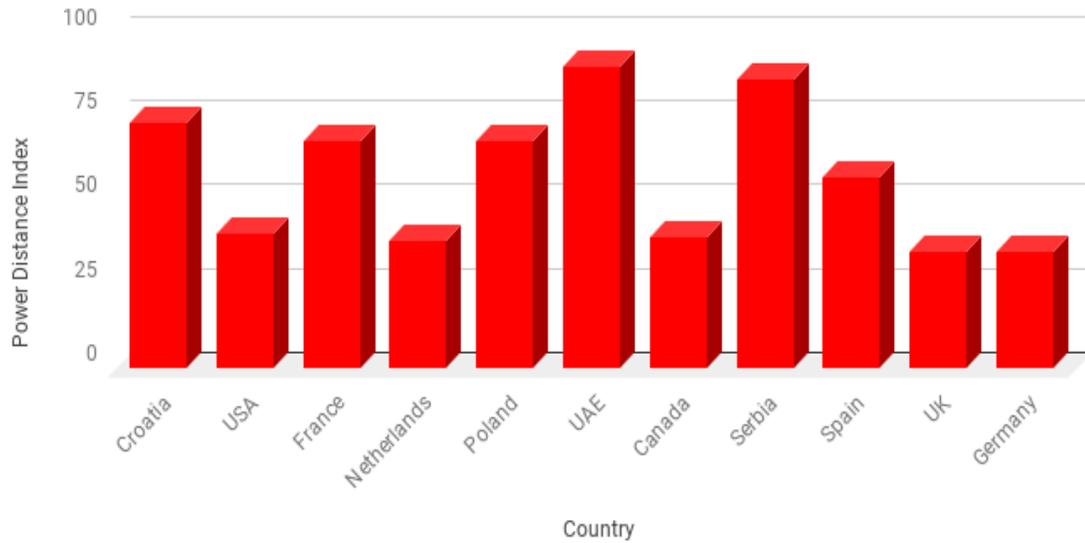
CONTACT INFORMATION:

Jana Ajdukovic under the supervision of (phone: 305-298-9510, e-mail: jxa940@umiami.edu) Dr. Wanhsiu Suuny Tsai (e-mail: wanhsiu@miami.edu) will gladly answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, at (305) 243-3195.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT:

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study and consent to be audio taped. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. I am entitled to a copy of this form for my personal records. Completion of the interview is my consent to participate.
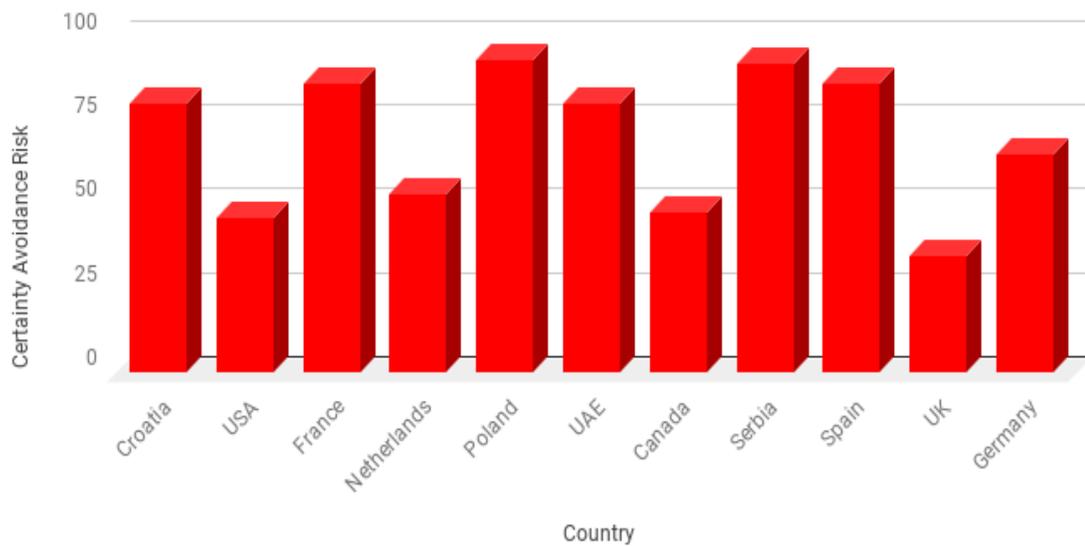
Appendix D. Charts

Power Distance Index

Data retrieved from https://www.hofstede-insights.com/

Uncertainty Avoidance

Data retrieved from https://www.hofstede-insights.com/