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The Phenomenology of Masters Alpine Ski Racers: Experiencing Ski Racing in Old Age

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the lived experience of ten older adult alpine ski racers in their continued participation in ski racing. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of these older adults as they continued to compete in ski racing. Masters skiers between the ages of 69 and 82 participated in individual interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Data analysis was completed using van Manen's phenomenological methods and the visual technique of mind mapping. The major theme that emerged was the importance of being a ski racer to participants' identities. The supporting subthemes were: enjoying the feeling of ski racing, the challenge of adjusting, and the adoption of a ski racer lifestyle. These insights offer opportunity to understand how to motivate athletes of all ages to maintain their athletic identity or to establish a new, physically active identity in old age.

Keywords

Aging, older adults, Masters athletes, Masters ski racers, alpine skiing, alpine ski racing, embodiment, identity, phenomenology, sports

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Glossary of Terms

Carve**	The act of digging the ski's edge into packed snow in order to turn.
Downhill*	Along with Super G, downhill is often referred to as a speed discipline. It features the steepest vertical drop and the most distance between gates, resulting in the highest speeds of all of the disciplines and therefore the highest risks. Downhill courses are designed to challenge skiers with terrain changes ranging from flats to small jumps. In order to be successful, skiers try to remain in their aerodynamic tuck position to reduce drag. The skis used in a downhill are the longest in order to provide stability. In a downhill race, the racers take one run, fastest time wins.
Freeskiing	A term used by ski racers to refer to skiing when not in a racecourse.
Gates**	A flag or pole in the snow marking a racing area. Traditionally made out of bamboo, now made out of plastic with a flexible, springy base.
Giant Slalom (GS)*	Along with slalom, GS is considered a technical discipline. The gates are closer together than in the speed disciplines, but farther apart than in a slalom. GS is a slower discipline than the speed disciplines as it requires quick turns back and forth around each gate. The skis used in a GS are slightly longer than those used in a slalom. In a GS race, a racer takes two runs and the fastest combined time wins.
Moguls**	Bumps set out on a slope, usually on more difficult runs and used by more advanced skiers.
Shaped Skis***	Also called parabolic skis, relatively new skis characterized by some form of an hourglass shape and designed for easier turning.
Slalom*	Along with GS, slalom is considered a technical discipline. There are more gates in a slalom course than in any other discipline, meaning the turns are tightest in a slalom requiring quick edge changes back and forth. The quickest time in a slalom course results from taking the most direct line. Racers therefore

knock the poles out of the way with their hands and shins (cross-blocking). The skis used in a slalom are the shortest to allow for quick turns. Racers also wear protective equipment unique to their discipline including pole guards to protect their hands, shin guards to protect their shins and knees, and chin guards to protect the face and mouth. In a slalom race, a racer takes two runs and the fastest combined time wins.

Super Giant Slalom (Super G)* Along with downhill, Super G is often referred to as a speed discipline. It features a shorter, slightly less steep course with tighter turns than a downhill, but longer, faster turns than in the giant slalom. The skis used in a Super G are slightly shorter than downhill skis, but longer than GS skis. Racers attempt to remain in their tuck position when possible, but more technical skill is required in order to turn around the gates. In a Super G, racers take one run, fastest time wins.

Straight skis*** Traditional, old style skis with no shape to them. Instead of carving, the skis are turned using various amounts of pressure and force.

Tuck* A tight, aerodynamic position in which the skier squats, leaning forward with the upper body. The poles are held under the arms parallel to the snow. This position is used mainly in speed disciplines in order to be more aerodynamic and therefore faster.

* Definitions are borrowed from:
Alpine Canada Alpin. (2016). *Alpine Skiing 101*. Retrieved from
<http://www.alpinecanada.org/canada-alpine-team/about>

** Definitions are borrowed from:
Fry, J. (2006). Glossary. In J. Fry (Eds.), *The Story of Modern Skiing* (pp. 349-360).
Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England.

*** Definitions are borrowed from:
Masia, S. (2004). Milestones and Detours in Ski Design. *Skiing Heritage*, 16(1), 18-22

Chapter 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The population of senior citizens in Canada is rapidly growing. In 2014 over 6 million Canadians were over the age of 65, and that number is expected to grow to over 9.5 million by the year 2030 (Government of Canada, 2014). Of great concern regarding this growing senior population is the lack of physically active seniors and baby boomers. Only 12% of adults aged 60 to 79 meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for older adults (Statistics Canada, 2015). In stark contrast to these statistics, is a unique group of seniors who continue to train and compete in sport: Masters athletes.

The category of Masters athlete is a relatively new phenomenon, emerging in the late 1960s (Weir, Baker, & Horton, 2010) and is becoming an increasingly popular part of aging for lifelong athletes and seniors looking to try something new. This population of highly fit individuals offers a unique perspective on what the underlying principles may be to maintain a physically active profile well into old age.

Masters athletes are different from their peers, who may define themselves as physically active or exercisers, because sport and exercise are two very different constructs. The competitive nature of sport demands rigorous training, time, and focused attention that everyday exercise does not. Masters sport is typically organized into five or ten year age categories, often beginning at the age of 30 or 35, but varying greatly depending on the sport and competition, and with no upper age limit (Weir et al., 2010). The context of Masters sport allows older adults to compete regularly against others of

similar age in competitions that range from local club events and weekly friendly competitions, to international competitions held every few years depending on the event (Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, & Horton, 2010).

Research on Masters athletes is growing due to the increase in popularity of sport for older adults and rapidly shifting demographics (Dionigi, 2016). Quantitatively focused projects often discuss the physical benefits associated with sport participation for older adults, for example a reduction in the development of degenerative diseases, higher levels of physiological functional capacity, improved memory, increased flexibility and muscular strength, and lower risk of premature morbidity (Baker & Schorer, 2010; Tanaka, 2010). Qualitative research in the field of Masters sport is less developed, but has begun to emerge with focus on the potential psychosocial benefits of Masters sport, the motivations behind continued participation in sport, and the experiences associated with being an aging athlete (Baker et al., 2010). Despite the paucity of research in this area, both quantitative and qualitative findings suggest there is value associated with sport participation in later life (Baker et al., 2010). The potential to learn from this cohort of older adults is intriguing and could present important repercussions for health care systems as well as the improvement of the latter years of life for many adults.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of older adult alpine ski racers in their continued participation in the sport of ski racing.

1.3 Overview: Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research project was phenomenology, which has a foundation in constructivism. As described by Wilding and Whiteford (2005):

“Phenomenology is a method of inquiry that offers a way of systematically studying and learning about phenomena that are typically difficult to observe or measure” (p. 99).

Rather than ‘explain’ how and why things come to be, phenomenology attempts to ‘describe’ by examining the *life world* in which exists each person’s perceptions of experience (Finlay, 1999). For my research, phenomenology allowed me to access the life worlds of older adult alpine ski racers as they experience ski racing in old age.

1.4 Overview: Methods

Participants for this study were recruited from ski clubs in the Alpine Ontario South region. Ten participants, ranging in ages from 69 to 82, took part in the study, with participation levels ranging from the local club level to the international level. Data collection involved the use of individual, open-ended phenomenological interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Field notes were also recorded to contextualize interview data. Data analysis was conducted as informed by the work of Max van Manen (1990) and through the use of the visual method of mind-mapping (Buzan & Buzan, 2002). A primary theme and subthemes were developed as supported by the lived experience of the participants in their continued participation in ski racing. The quality of the study was ensured based on five criteria suggested by de Witt and Ploeg (2006) including balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization.

1.5 Reflexivity and Statement of Self

In qualitative research, knowledge is not created by disembodied voices but rather the embodied researcher whose body inescapably influences the research process in every aspect (Ellingson, 2006). As researcher, my body is marked by my own experiences and knowledge; its influence therefore cannot be detached from the research process (Ellingson, 2006). In an effort to bring my body into my research, I have attempted to be reflexive regarding my influence within the study from the time of the study's conception, to interaction with participants, and to the interpretation of participants' lived experience. The purpose of this section therefore is introspection to bring light to myself as researcher through my own lived experiences, assumptions, behaviours, and positioning and how they might impact this research project. The aim of this section is to help readers further understand the research topic: the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers.

Of utmost importance to this study, is my background as an alpine ski racer, as it is my passion for the sport of ski racing that led me to conceptualize the project in the first place. Both of my parents grew up ski racing; my mom at Devil's Elbow and my dad at Hidden Valley, and both continue to ski race to this day at the ages of 55 and 56. My two brothers and I were enrolled in the racing program at Hidden Valley, in my hometown of Huntsville, Ontario, when we reached the age of four. My parents generally gave us a lot of choice when it came to selecting extra-curricular activities, but being ski racers was mandatory. From the age of two until I finished high school, I spent every single weekend in the winter at the ski hill with my family. My parents would get up at 5:00 AM to drive us to races in Collingwood or elsewhere. As we got older, we missed

school most Fridays to train. Every March break was spent on a ski trip; in fact, I have trouble remembering our last family vacation that was not a ski trip. We even took a ski trip to Chile in August one year when we decided we could not wait until the winter to ski! Skiing really became an important part of my family's life. My brothers and I all had some success with racing, but it was mostly the lifestyle that we enjoyed and still enjoy.

If I were to reflect on what being a ski racer means to me, it would start with the important relationships derived from the world of ski racing. As I got older, skiing became about friendships as well as family. To this day, my best friends are my ski friends. My boyfriend of four years and I met ski racing. In fact, our grandparents decided to join the ski club at Hidden Valley at the same time in the 1960s and our fathers grew up ski racing together. Being able to share a valued part of my life with someone who has the same values as I do has been very special. Not only is that lifestyle shared with one other person, but it has also allowed for an intertwined, important relationship between our two families who ski together every weekend.

Being a ski racer to me also means being able to experience something truly unique and exceptional. Ski racing is unlike any other sport I have ever participated in. The physicality the sport requires is addicting. There is nothing like the feeling of leaning so far into a turn that your knuckles drag on the snow. It is a feeling ripe with adrenaline, a little bit of fear, and sheer excitement. Ski racing is also synonymous with speed. There is no room for hesitation if you want to get to the finish line with the fastest time. There is a certain amount of recklessness needed to succeed and to throw one's body down the hill as fast as possible. I believe it is the shared, implicit experiences between skiers that allow for close relationships to form and thrive.

It is hopefully fairly clear where the ‘ski racer’ part of my thesis came from. The older adult part came a little bit from my experience as a skier, but also from my experience working after obtaining my Kinesiology degree. When I graduated from Kinesiology in 2013, my first job was as a physiotherapy assistant at a long-term care facility. I had never worked with older adults before but quickly learned that I truly loved it. From here, I started working with the Victorian Order of Nurses as an exercise leader. I taught exercise classes for seniors in retirement homes and in the community. I learned quickly the value of exercise in healthy aging and decided to pursue my Masters degree in the field of Health and Aging at Western. I was unsure of what my thesis would be, but knew I wanted to focus on older adults and exercise because of the value I had seen first hand in being fit into old age. Dr. Connelly, my thesis supervisor, encouraged me to use my own experiences and interests to devise a thesis topic. Over Christmas break of my first year in the program, I came up with my thesis topic after watching a 92-year-old family friend and longtime skier, race down the hill. Perhaps selfishly, I wanted to know how I could still be skiing at that level into my 90s, and thus my project was born.

From the onset of the project, Dr. Connelly and I knew it would be very important for me, as the researcher and central figure who influences collection, selection and interpretation of data, to look inward and practice reflexivity (Finlay, 2002). As Finlay (2002) writes: “Having come to understand that the researcher, the world, and the researcher’s experience of the world are intertwined, the challenge is to identify that lived experience that resides in the space between subject and object” (p. 533). As an alpine ski racer myself, it was necessary for me to identify my pre-understandings and how they may influence the research at all points in time during the research process. It was

essential to focus on how I was “enmeshed in prereflexive existence” (Finlay, 2002, p. 533) with my subjects simply by being a ski racer. The benefit of being an insider in the world of ski racing was my ability to use my pre-understandings to first make connections with my participants, and subsequently evaluate my data with a pre-existing understanding of the sport. I did however practice reflexivity by keeping field notes. I recorded information for my benefit, including conversations that took place with participants on the chairlift, moments of displays of emotions (e.g., tears, laughter), and observations of participant behaviour outside of voice recorded interviews. I used this information to help contextualize my data and inform interpretation of data. Using phenomenology allowed me to let the participants’ stories speak for themselves. My voice as researcher and insider helped to guide the ability for readers, especially non-skiers, to understand the data and findings. I was fortunate to have a great thesis advisory team to question things that I took as implicit, forcing me to look at my data in a different way. Hopefully my findings come across as accessible and meaningful to all readers.

1.6 Thesis Outline

In this first chapter, I introduced the study by presenting a background, the purpose of the study, an overview of the methodology and methods used, and insight into myself as researcher. The second chapter is comprised of a literature review of relevant information pertaining to Masters athletes and the sport of alpine ski racing. Existing gaps in the literature are discussed, suggesting the need for further exploration into topics that are examined in this study.

Chapter 3 provides a more in depth look into the methodology and methods used to guide the study. The use of phenomenology as a methodology is explored and

justified. An overview of the methods used to collect and analyze data is also presented, including information on study sites, recruitment, sampling, and ethical and quality considerations.

Chapter 4 offers a presentation of the findings of the lived experience of older adult ski racers categorized into one main theme and three subthemes. The main theme suggested the importance of possessing a ski racer identity to the continued participation in ski racing. This theme was supported by subthemes including the enjoyment of the feeling of ski racing, the necessity of making adjustments, and the adoption of a ski racing lifestyle.

In the final chapter, the findings are discussed according to my understandings as well as in relation to previous works. Concluding remarks are made, limitations of the study are presented, and the potential for future research is discussed.

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Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Research pertaining to Masters athletes has become progressively more common, which perhaps is not surprising given the increasingly positive role physical activity has played in promoting healthy living. (Dionigi, 2016). In this review of relevant literature, various studies with a qualitative, sociological viewpoint are discussed in order to provide a glimpse into what research pertaining to Masters athletes has uncovered thus far. The focus of this literature review is on qualitative studies due to an interest in the meaning and sociological understanding of Masters sport participation by participants rather than quantitative evidence described through statistics. Studies pertaining to older athletes are varied in methodology and diverse in sports studied, therefore relevant, main themes of these research studies are outlined and summarized. A limited number of studies have also explored the area of embodiment as it relates to Masters athletes (*see for example*, Tulle, 2008). A brief outline of embodiment as a concept is described as well as research pertaining to Masters athletes and embodiment. Lastly the sport of alpine ski racing is discussed showing the lack of literature in the entire field of ski racing. To begin the review of literature, a look at how Western views of aging and sport are related to the emergence of sport participation in later life is presented.

2.2 Masters Athletes and Discourses on Aging

Older adults' participation in competitive sport is inevitably tied to society's views on sport and aging (Dionigi, 2016). Traditionally, old age has been viewed through

a medicalized lens portraying older adults as weak, ill, frail, disabled, and disengaged (Dionigi, Horton & Bellamy, 2011; Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007; Eman, 2012; Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Staying healthy and fit for as long as possible has become an overarching goal of society in order to avoid or delay this part of life (Dionigi, 2016). Masters athletes therefore do not fit into the traditional mold of older adults, but rather challenge the stereotype through their continued participation in sport. In a study by Dionigi (2006) on the motives and experiences of Masters Games participants, some athletes even looked upon their aged peers negatively in comparison to themselves. Modern counter discourses on aging have begun to emerge focusing on the potential for aging to be positive, active or successful (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007; Eman, 2012). ‘Successful aging’ views later life as devoid of disease and dependency and as a time for enjoyment, leisure, exercise, good health, and vitality (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007; Pfister, 2012). Masters athletes according to this model are highly successful agers. Both discourses of aging unfortunately promote ageism in one way or another (Phoenix & Smith, 2011). A medicalized view of aging creates stereotypes whereas a successful aging model implies that older adults who are in poor health have aged unsuccessfully, ignoring the natural physiological decline associated with old age (Phoenix & Smith, 2011). New discourses on aging have also emerged with researchers employing more of a biographical model which sees aging as a process of negotiating multiple understandings of the self amid continuously changing resources (Chapman, 2005; Dionigi, Horton, et al., 2011; Phoenix & Smith, 2011; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009). As Phoenix and Sparkes (2009) suggested in their case study on an older adult runner, narratives are embodied, lived and shaped by everyday interactions. For the participant in Phoenix and Sparkes’ (2009) study, aging

well meant having the ability to make meaning of events in later life and being able to cope with challenges associated with aging. Many studies on Masters athletes in recent years have shown sport to be a context for accepting, denying, adapting to, fighting, and/or celebrating the aging body depending on the athlete's attitude towards old age (Dionigi, 2016).

2.3 Masters Athletes and Discourses on Sport

Society's push for healthy aging in recent years has increased opportunities for older adults to participate in sport (Dionigi & O'Flynn, 2007). When an aging body is seen as a 'problem', encouraging older adults to remain physically active can be seen as a part of the 'fix' (Dionigi, 2016; Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Traditionally sport, as understood in the Western world, is highly competitive, performance-oriented, and often promoted to young, fit, males (Dionigi, 2016; Dionigi, Baker & Horton, 2011; Pfister, 2012). Alternate views of sport emphasize its use for promoting joy, fair play, inclusion, cooperation, pleasurable movement experience, and growth (Dionigi, 2016; Pfister, 2012). Typically, this alternative discourse of sport is associated with unconventional sporting contexts including Masters sport (Dionigi, 2016; Pfister, 2012). With the emphasis on successful aging and avoidance of dependency in old age, sport has become incorporated into discourses of aging (Dionigi, 2016). Many studies on Masters athletes have also suggested that older athletes fit into both the participatory/pleasure model of sport as well as the performance model traditionally associated with youth (Dionigi, 2016; Dionigi, Baker, et al., 2011). For example, in a study by Dionigi, Baker and Horton (2011) it was found that participants enjoyed the process of participation including socialization, fair play and self-improvement, as well as the outcomes of

competition such as winning, recognition and setting records. As sport has become highly valued across the lifespan, continued research on Masters athletes may offer insight into how to structure sporting environments for older adults in order to maintain appeal (Dionigi, 2016).

2.4 Qualitative Research on Masters Athletes

The dedication to sport that Masters athletes' show can be a great learning tool. By examining the reasons for continued participation in sport, perhaps much can be learned about the motivations behind physical activity adherence in old age (Medic, 2010). The existing literature has begun to examine this issue with a more sociological and qualitative focus than in the past, but inquiry into the experiences of the lived sporting and aged body is still greatly lacking (Dionigi, 2006). The research that does exist is diverse in methodology, participant selection and findings. Some researchers focus specifically on a particular group of older adults such as women (Dionigi, 2006; Dionigi, 2010; Kirby & Kluge, 2013; Pfister, 2012), older athletes who are new to sport (Dionigi, 2002; Dionigi, Baker, et al., 2011; Kirby & Kluge, 2013), lifelong athletes transitioning to Masters sport (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016; Tulle, 2007), or a combination of participants of all ages, sexes and experience (Dionigi, Baker, et al., 2011; Grant, 2001; Heo, Culp, Yamada, & Won, 2013). Diverse results emerge depending on if the researcher chose one participant as a case study (Pfister, 2012; Rathwell & Young, 2014; Roper et al., 2003), selected participants who belonged to a single team (Kirby & Kluge, 2013), or sampled a variety of athletes from large, multi-sport environments such as the World Masters Games (Dionigi, Horton & Baker, 2013a; Grant, 2001; Heo et al., 2013). Regardless of the style of research, the lived experiences

derived from participating in sport in old age appear to be “expansive, dynamic, and completely imbued with multiple interpretations” (Grant, 2001, p. 795). In accordance with the pleasure and participation sport discourse, much of the literature suggests that sport gives older adults an opportunity to enjoy themselves, be social, learn something new, and participate (Kirby & Kluge, 2013; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Phoenix & Orr, 2014). Kirby and Kluge (2013) for example indicated that for older women new to the sport of volleyball, learning a new skill in later life was exciting and rewarding, especially in the context of a team sport wherein experience can be shared with teammates. In contrast, many older adults have also indicated the importance of being competitive, experiencing success, training hard, being challenged, and fighting old age through physical fitness (Dionigi, Baker, et al., 2011; Dionigi, Horton Baker, 2013b; Eman, 2012; Rathwell & Young, 2015; Tulle, 2007). Rathwell and Young (2015) for example, found that their case study participant used Masters sport as an opportunity to challenge himself and fulfill his need for competition. A common finding emerging in Masters athlete related research involving different subjects and different research questions, was the idea of the possession of an athletic identity being important to older adult sportspeople in their continued participation in sport (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016; Dionigi, 2002; Dionigi, 2010; Dionigi et al., 2013a; Grant, 2001; Heo et al., 2013; Stevenson, 2002; Tulle, 2007; Tulle, 2008). Some discussed a continuation of an athletic identity from earlier life into old age leading to a continuation in participation (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016; Dionigi 2002; Dionigi et al., 2013a; Heo et al., 2013; Stevenson, 2002). Others discussed the formation of an athletic identity later in life for older adults who may not have had the opportunity to participate in sports in their youth (Dionigi,

2002; Dionigi 2010). Furthermore, many discussed the adaptation of one's athletic identity to that of a Masters athlete as the body ages, thus allowing the continued participation in competitive sport (Dionigi et al., 2013b; Grant, 2001; Heo et al., 2013; Tulle, 2007). In Tulle's (2007) study on Masters runners, it was suggested that participants adapted to their aging bodies and worked hard to overcome injuries in order to be able to continue to run and maintain their athletic identity. Being a runner appeared to have become embodied for these athletes through their pursuit of mastery in the sport and therefore continuing to run in old age enabled the enactment of this important part of themselves (Tulle, 2007). The varied experiences attributed to the participation in sport by Masters athletes offers insight into the diversity of this group of older adults from which one may come to understand how better to support and facilitate sport as a lifelong phenomenon.

2.5 Embodiment

The concept of embodiment in a research context focuses on the body as a subject of perception of the world and the means by which we come to understand the world (Park Lala & Kinsella, 2011). An embodied perspective assumes that it is through the body that one interacts with and accesses the world especially through perception, emotion, sexuality, and movement through space and time (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). The knowledge that is felt in the body is one primary way of knowing that comes before language or symbolization (Park Lala & Kinsella, 2011). Embodiment is mediated by one's interactions with others, and therefore is an experience that is embedded in relational interactions; it is an intercorporeal concept (Park Lala & Kinsella, 2011). The term embodiment is used rather than 'the body' or 'bodies' as embodiment "involves a

self who is embodied and a self which cannot be disentangled from its corporeality” (Woodward, 2009, p.1). The skillful, embodied intelligence that exists through the body’s interaction with the world is often overlooked in research practice as this sense of knowing that is felt in the body is often hard to describe and define (Park Lala & Kinsella, 2011). To understand the complexities of embodied experience involves engaging with the phenomenology of the lived body (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007).

2.5.1 Embodiment and athletic identity

Embodiment and identity are intertwined and inseparable. Tulle (2008) suggests that the formation of an athletic identity is achieved through the embodiment of athletic mastery by way of the sentient body. She (2008) writes: “what boxers, bodybuilders, ballet dancers and runners ultimately construct and achieve through the embodiment of mastery and the acquisition of different forms of capital is their identity as boxer, bodybuilder, ballet dancer and runner” (p. 36). As Ford and Brown (2006) suggest, by way of practice in a particular sport, the body is inscribed with experience that can be called upon in future situations. These inscriptions then become embodied and form the basis of the construction of an athletic identity by giving meaning and value through the sporting body (Ford & Brown, 2006). Tulle (2008) suggests that athletic identity can also be achieved when the body visibly shows the embodied effort one puts into developing athletic skills. In other words, as the body transforms so too does the self. Looking like an athlete allows a person’s embodied self to be visible to others thus confirming that person’s athletic role-identity (Tulle, 2008). In some cases, athletes will proudly wear medals and clothing from competitions to prove to others their identity as an athlete (Heo et al., 2013). Tulle (2008) sees the process of identity adherence and formation as

circular, for example “one runs to run and in the process one becomes a runner, so one runs to be and remain a runner” (p. 95). An athletic identity is derived from an athlete’s endowment with an athletic body and mind resulting from the embodiment of practice, improvement and sensation (Tulle, 2008). A Masters athlete’s ability to maintain this identity despite an aging body may speak to the importance of their athletic identity to their sense of self (Tulle, 2008).

Furthermore, the consolidation of an athletic identity comes from confirmation of others. As Ford & Brown (2006) write in regards to becoming a surfer: “they require identity confirmation by key others in the subculture as part of the construction of a surfing identity through the demonstration of the right embodied qualities while riding the wave” (p. 132). Embodied experience allows the athlete to perform according to their role identity, and thus be seen as a surfer (or athlete) by others (Ford & Brown, 2006).

2.5.2 Embodiment and sport

Embodiment and sport are highly related. The experience of sport is a widely sensuous one, and one that is largely dependent on the body in the way that it moves, feels, and reacts (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). In an article by Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007), the relative lack of research that takes into account the true lived experiences of the athletic body was noted despite the obvious potential to learn from the embodied perspective of sporting bodies. Tulle (2008) writes, “sporting bodies are prime examples of bodies at work, where bodily processes interact with phenomenological processes, to yield sporting, social, economic and aesthetic capital” (p. x). As Tulle (2008) suggests, athletes embody themselves with musculature, strength, and physical competence and come to know their bodies on a heightened level. Through training, pain

and injury the Masters runners in Tulle's (2008) study learned to listen to their bodies and understand the messages their bodies were relaying. Tulle (2008) argues that the constant urge to train and improve becomes embodied. Athletes therefore constantly search for the best, most efficient way of embodying themselves with the strength and speed to improve (Tulle, 2008).

Athletes in all sports often have an awareness of the physical sensations derived from actively being in a sporting context affected by weather, physical surroundings, terrain, conditions, as well as the participant's body itself (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). As Woodward (2009) writes: "Sensations, sensibilities and sensuality are all implicated in sporting embodied practices" (p. 5). Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007) suggest ways of analyzing embodiment in the sporting context, primarily through the sensory activity of sports participants, including movement and rhythm, aural and respiration, visual, olfactory, and touch.

According to Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007), movement is axiomatic to sport, as the sporting environment is rarely perceived from a static position. From an embodied perspective, movement is linked to emotion as evident in participant accounts of being 'in the zone' or feeling the 'flow' of the game (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) describe this feeling as one that precludes language and is often hard to describe outside of the bodily context to those who have not experienced its sensation. They divide the concept of movement into timing and rhythm, timing referring to regulating the order of actions to achieve a desired result and rhythm referring to skillful coordination of the body (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). The embodied sense of rhythm and timing develops with practice mediated by sensations

emanating from organs, tendons, ligaments, and muscles (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007).

Sound—as it exists in the sporting context—is both information and sensation. As Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) write: “perhaps the most fundamental way in which sportspeople listen is to their own embodied selves when engaged in sporting action” (p. 120). Intimately linked to aural perceptions in sport is an athlete’s breathing pattern (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). As Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) discuss, with experience an athlete develops a keen awareness of how performance and breathing patterns are related and emotionally connected.

According to Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007), the visual component of sport is largely a combination of past experiences in a similar context. The course of action an athlete takes in a given situation depends on the visual codes embodied within them that are the result of past situations seen by the athlete (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) note that the terrain of play is seen and interpreted by way of an athlete’s past sporting knowledge. Typically the primary concerns of an athlete relating to what they perceive in their visual field is safety and optimal performance (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007).

Further, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) suggest that the olfactory component of sport also functions to generate a highly emotional and embodied response. They (2007) discuss smell as being linked to memory, and consequently having the ability to link present moments in sport to past moments in similar contexts. Each sporting environment has its own smell scape, which, as the sport becomes embodied and part of one’s identity, elicits a charged emotional response (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007).

Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) further suggest that sport is widely associated with touch. They (2007) contend that athletes have a haptic relationship with their sporting environment. The haptic experience is defined by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) as one that provides information to the athlete about the features of playing surfaces, equipment, the environment, as well as their own bodies through a combination of tactile and locomotive properties. By using these haptic resources, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) suggest that athletes are able to tune into their ever-evolving sporting environment. A two-way embodied relationship is formed as athletes touch and are touched and use feedback received from haptic experience as input influencing decisions during play (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) write, “it is a directly embodied way of feeling and experiencing the world, and seeking to understand its properties” (p. 123).

The sensuous experience of sport constitutes an environment for the development of highly specific skills through movement and the manipulation of objects (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). Allen-Collinson (2011) contends that the sensory intelligence developed in the sporting field is used to execute specific sporting action. With practice, an athlete’s knowledge of their sport as well as their skilled actions become embodied (Tulle, 2008). As Allen-Collinson (2011) writes about training, “corporeal know-how is developed via socialization into specific training practices, so that the sporting ‘habit-body’ not only requires a cognitive understanding of its tasks but also develops corporeally embedded knowledge and memory” (p. 304). Allen-Collinson (2009), contends that habitual training allows skill and knowledge to become embodied and be expressed as a natural, pre-reflexive response in a sporting environment. In a study

examining the embodied skill of cricket batters, Sutton (2007) likened the habitual learning achieved through training to such every day practices as driving and talking simultaneously. Sutton (2007) also noted the use of engrained memories by an athlete to adjust to context and situation.

Tulle (2008) argues that sport becomes more than just a pastime; it becomes embedded into the conduct of an athlete's life. For instance, as Ford & Brown (2006) write about the embodiment of surfers, "over time, a relationship between the developing surfer's habitus and the practical surfing world around them becomes stronger, more logical until eventually the body begins to feel itself being 'hailed' by the surf" (p. 125).

2.5.3 Embodiment and Masters athletes

Athletes of all ages over time develop a heightened awareness of their bodies. Masters athletes as an aging population must also engage in the awareness of their bodies as aging in a similar way to non-athletes as aging and embodiment are undeniably intertwined (Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2014). As Tulle (2008) writes regarding Masters runners, "ageing forces athletes to confront the ephemerality of the athletic body and identity" (p. 115). Despite the heightened physicality of the older athlete in comparison to their peers, Masters athletes are forced to face some kind of irrevocable change in their functional ability associated with the physiological process of aging (Grant, 2001). According to the findings of a study by Grant (2001), for many older athletes, the inevitable physical decline was seen as a nuisance or frustration, rather than an excuse to disengage from sporting practice. Knowing how to manage their ailing bodies was seen as important to Masters athletes as it allowed them to make adjustments in order to continue to enact their role as athletes (Grant, 2001). Some techniques used

by older athletes to counter the ephemerality of the aging body and preserve longevity in sport include altering strategy in the sporting arena, taking care of an injury, and even choosing a new, lower impact sport (Dionigi et al., 2013a)

Limitations in physicality and thus performance do not necessarily result in the loss of the physical, sensual experience of participating in sport (Tulle, 2008; Woodward, 2009). As Tulle (2008) writes, “the pleasures associated with athletic pursuits may override the bodily decrements brought on by ageing” (p. 127). In fact, participants interviewed in Tulle’s (2008) study reported heightened proprioceptive skills and greater awareness of their body’s movement and abilities in the sporting environment. For many older athletes, the appeal of competing in sport has been reported to be associated with their ability to express and test their physicality (Dionigi, Baker, et al., 2011). As Woodward (2009) writes:

The embodied practices of sport are also sources of extreme pleasure for those who participate and for those who are spectators. Sport is fun. It is also challenging and frequently involves competition, but to engage in body practices that extend the possibilities of corporeality and which permit the deepest enjoyment of physicality, as well as the discipline required, raises sporting embodied practices beyond the banal and the routine (p.5).

This idea of pleasure in the physicality of sport is evident in Rathwell and Young’s (2015) case study of a Masters runner who expressed the pleasure gained from bodily sensation associated with running: “I enjoy feeling my body working” (p. 724). Similarly, in a study by Phoenix and Orr (2014) a cyclist commented: “There is a tremendous sense of pleasure as your body does what you expect” (p. 97).

2.6 Alpine Ski Racing

Research regarding alpine skiing in general is scarce, especially in a qualitative context. It was therefore necessary for this review of literature to be open to broader sporting perspectives. Alpine ski racing as a sport has unique elements that arguably classify it as a traditional sport such as basketball or soccer, as well as an alternative or nature-based sport such as surfing or rock climbing. Traditional sport is characterized by closed environments and are highly regulated and regimented whereas alternative sports involve engagement with ever changing natural elements where creativity and emotion are revered and celebrated (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). Existing research on alternative sport commonly includes sports such as rock climbing (Robinson, 2004), windsurfing (Humberstone, 2011), snowboarding (Thorpe, 2008), surfing (Ford & Brown, 2006) and scuba diving (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2011) with the occasional mention of downhill ski racing (Rhea & Martin, 2010). The sport of alpine ski racing does involve rules and regulation in the realm of traditional sport, such as the requirement to go around gates on the correct side in order to avoid disqualification, but the engagement of participants with the environment, equipment and body validates ski racing as a nature-based, alternative sport (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). In an article by Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) discussing the bringing to light of the experience of alternative sport athletes, common experiences of alternative sport participants are discussed. They suggest that as in traditional sport, practiced skills become embodied and second nature over time, but in alternative sports the body must also remain “fluid and adaptable” (p. 1271) to account for changing environments, the invention of new techniques and the emergence of new technology (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) also indicate the significance of

human interaction with objects in alternative sporting practices as often the equipment defines the activity itself and becomes “an extension of the body” (p. 1273). A major element of alternative or nature-based sport is the constantly evolving ‘playing field’ (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). Unlike in traditional sport where the environment is relatively fixed (e.g., the basket in basketball is always ten feet above the ground) alternative sport participants must constantly adjust their body positioning and technique relative to their sporting world (e.g., changing snow conditions) making a harmonious relationship with ‘mother nature’ meaningful (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). Lastly, Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) discuss the ability for alternative sports to generate increased bodily awareness in time and space as a result of the relationship of the body’s kinaesthetic movement to the environment resulting in increased sensory appreciation. Other literature implicates the added element of risk in alternative sport for reasoning behind increased bodily awareness (Humberstone, 2011; Rhea & Martin, 2010). Alpine ski racing therefore does share elements of alternative, nature-based sports as well as elements of more regimented traditional sports.

2.6.1 Masters alpine skiing

The sport of alpine ski racing is largely absent from any Masters athlete literature. Similarly, studies pertaining to nature-based, alternative sports do not include the experiences of older adult participants. Existing research on Masters athletes shows that older athletes compete in a variety of sports, including summer and winter sports, indoor and outdoor sports, and individual and team sports (Weir, Baker, & Horton, 2010). A great deal of research takes place in multiple sport settings such as the World Masters Games (*see, for example*, Dionigi et al., 2013a). There are also many studies that focus

on common, traditional sports, for example, swimming (Stevenson, 2002) or running (Tulle, 2007). Alpine skiing is of particular interest because of the physicality of the sport requiring not only skill in technique, agility and balance, but also courage (Alpine Canada, 2015). Older adults who participate in skiing therefore are subjecting their bodies to physical strain and the possibility of injury from falls at great speed. The risk element associated with alpine ski racing is not always imperative in traditionally studied Masters sports.

2.7 Gaps in Literature

Despite a growing body of research regarding the experience of Masters athletes, there exist unexplored areas within the discipline, especially from a qualitative perspective. As Dionigi (2016) writes in a recent review of psychosocial and sociological issues surrounding Masters sport, “The phenomenon of older people competing in sport is complex and multidimensional” (p. 61). The experience of Masters athletes in their sporting endeavours can continue to produce rich, novel insight into the world of sport for older athletes because of the diverse and dynamic interpretations each individual athlete attributes to his or her participation (Grant, 2001). Additional qualitative research is required in order to better understand the lived experience of older athletes.

One avenue of limited research pertaining to Masters athletes involves athletes who are well into their senior years. Masters athletes can vary in age, for example, in gymnastics an athlete is considered a Master when they are just 22 years old (Weir et al., 2010). Many studies therefore do not set age limits but rather use the definition of Masters athletes to encompass many age groups. When Appleby and Dieffenbach (2016) studied Masters cyclists, the participants ranged in age from 39 to 68. Given the nearly

30 year age difference in some participants, Appleby and Dieffenbach (2016) noted the inability of their research to examine the unique influences affecting athletes in specific age ranges, especially related to the corporeality of their aging bodies. Research investigating the experience of adults over the age of 65 in sport is limited, perhaps because of the physical decline that inevitably occurs for most people around this stage of life. Stories of continued participation in sport after the age of 65 would provide unique insight into the resilience of this population of Masters athletes as they deal with their aging bodies in a highly physical environment.

Exploring new sporting contexts outside of the realm of what has already been studied is also needed in order to provide additional insight into the perceptions of older adult sport participants. The majority of research pertaining to Masters athletes explores the athlete's experience within traditional sport such as running (Tulle, 2007), swimming (Stevenson, 2002), or volleyball (Kirby & Kluge, 2013). Alpine ski racing offers a unique perspective as it has not yet been used as a context in which to study Masters athletes.

Qualitative studies on Masters athletes are growing, but as Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) note, there are "relatively few accounts to be found that are truly grounded in the carnal realities of the lived sporting body" (p. 116). This is especially true of the lived aging sporting body. Conducting research concerning Masters athletes therefore must involve the investigation of how older athletes experience the sporting world through their bodies. The sport of alpine ski racing provides opportunity to do so as it is a nature-based sport, meaning an increased bodily awareness may be established

due to the relationship between the body's kinaesthetic movement and the changing environment (Thrope & Rinehart, 2010).

Despite the association of nature-based sports with embodiment and emotion, there exists little research fully exploring the lived experiences of athletes who participate in them. According to Wheaton (as cited in Humberstone, 2011):

...despite the centrality of embodied experiences in lifestyle sports, few studies have managed to realise, articulate and communicate the complexities of the sensual, emotion and aesthetic aspects of these experiences. ...there are few activities that are so vividly entwined with the 'acting, perceiving, thinking and feeling body.' (p. 497)

Masters alpine ski racers, through articulation of their lived, embodied experience, can therefore offer novel insight into what it means to be an older athlete.

2.8 Summary

To conclude, the emergent gaps in Masters athlete literature formulated the development of a novel research question: what is the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers in their continued participation in the sport of alpine ski racing? The selection of this research question provided a platform for exploring and understanding the experience of Masters alpine ski racers as it is reported by older adults as lived through their aging bodies. The study contributes to literature on continued participation in sport by older adults and also addresses a gap in research concerning the sport of alpine skiing.

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Chapter 3

3 Methodology and Methods

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Epistemological assumptions

All research is guided by an underlying philosophy, or paradigm, which reflects a worldview and is visible in the researcher's choice of methods in a research project (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba & Lincoln (1994) present the question of epistemology as "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (p. 108).

The epistemological assumptions that underpin this research project align with an interpretive or constructivist perspective. Constructivism posits that each individual has a unique understanding of reality based on one's sociocultural location and experience (Ponterotto, 2005). Members of a particular cultural group through interaction with others sharing certain values and beliefs may develop shared understandings over time (Ponterotto, 2005). Objective reality cannot be partitioned out of an individual who is experiencing their own reality (Ponterotto, 2005). Deep reflection on the part of the social actor is necessary in order to bring meaning to the surface, which can be accomplished through researcher-participant dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005). The dynamic interaction between the researcher and participant therefore is an essential relationship in order to uncover the 'lived experience' of the participant as the investigation proceeds (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005).

3.1.1 Phenomenological methodology

Phenomenology aligns with the assumptions of a constructivist perspective. It was chosen as a research approach that allows for an interactive dialogue between participant and researcher with the goal of ascribing meaning in context to the participant's lived experience (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Phenomenology is the art and science of exploring phenomena from the firsthand accounts of research participants and their perception or experience of the phenomenon as it is lived (van Manen, 1990). The purpose of phenomenology is to attend to that which makes a thing what it is (van Manen, 1990). To uncover the nature of something is to explore and illuminate the complexities of human experience as they relate to the phenomenon under study (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). The goal of phenomenology is not to 'explain,' but to describe how and why things come to be (Finlay, 1999). Phenomenologists focus on the *life world* in which exists each person's individual perceptions of experience, filled with complex meanings and acting as the backdrop for everyday actions and interactions (Finlay, 1999). Finlay (1999) describes the essential features of the life world as identity, sociality, embodiedness, spatiality, and temporality, each waiting to be uncovered by the researcher. For my research specifically, phenomenology allows me to access the life worlds of older adult alpine ski racers in relation to their participation in sport as they experience it through their bodies, through space and time, as part of their identity, and as social beings.

Phenomenology is not just one all-encompassing school of thought; there are a number of schools of phenomenology with commonalities and differences between them (Dowling, 2005). Two main approaches to inquiry exist within phenomenology:

descriptive and interpretive hermeneutic. Descriptive phenomenology places emphasis on universal essences, meaning the researcher must practice the act of bracketing out their preunderstandings in order to separate context and previous knowledge from the true underlying phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). In the hermeneutic interpretive approach, context is important and the idea of bracketing is seen as unrealistic as the researcher is recognized as a situated interpreter of phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Further this research is guided by the work of Max van Manen, a proponent of phenomenology, who offers useful frameworks for the conduct and analysis of phenomenological research. van Manen's (1990) phenomenology aims to bring to light a phenomenon experienced by a person in a way that allows others to understand it. van Manen's phenomenology combines descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Dowling, 2007). In his description, van Manen (1990) acknowledges that "it is a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an *interpretive* (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there is no such thing as uninterpreted phenomena" (p. 181). In short, descriptions of the nature of a thing is important, but so are the interpretations and reflections of the observer. Interpretations of a person's lived experience of a phenomenon are not seen as 'right' or 'wrong,' but rather as the researcher's interpretations of the participant's accounts, which if rendered with careful attention to rigour and reflection, can put forth "plausible insights" (van Manen, 1990). van Manen's (1990) phenomenology does not support the practice of bracketing as in purely descriptive practices. He writes: "If we simply try to forget or ignore what we

already ‘know’, we might find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections” (van Manen, 1990, p.47).

In my research on older adult ski racers, I believe that my situatedness as a skier, and reflection on myself as a participant in the sport of ski racing and what it means to be a ski racer, shaped my capacity to understand and interpret the lived experience of the participants. While I was careful to keep an open mind, to be reflexive about my assumptions, and to try not to skew the interpretations of others’ lived experience with my own understandings, I also believe I was able to form closer connections and trust with the interviewees given this common understanding between us, than would otherwise have been the case.

van Manen’s work is informed by a number of philosophers of phenomenology. Of particular interest to my work, are insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s existentialist phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology emphasizes the primacy of the body in human perception through an embodied sense of being (Cerbone, 2006). We know the world through our bodies just as our bodies produce the world for us (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). Our bodies’ perception of the world is inseparably linked to movement (Cerbone, 2006). Moreover, bodily movement is linked to intentionality, which according to Merleau-Ponty, lies at the core of perception (Cerbone, 2006). Merleau-Ponty also discusses habituated bodily action that is often complex and necessary in daily life (Cerbone, 2006). This pre-reflexive, taken for granted action is described by Merleau-Ponty as a corporeal schema and represents one’s grasp on the world from the perspective of the body (Cerbone, 2006). Habituated bodily action is an important concept in relation to athletes as their bodies’ immersion in habitual

training results in a corporeal understanding of how to do their sport (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007).

van Manen (1990) highlights Merleau-Ponty's four 'existentials' that he contends comprise the life world and pervade all individual life worlds: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived relation to other (relationality). Spatiality refers to 'felt space' in that the space in which one finds oneself affects the way one feels (van Manen, 1990). For example, being in a wide open landscape might make one feel free (van Manen, 1990). Corporeality refers to the phenomenological view that one is always bodily in the world (van Manen, 1990). When one meets a new person, one meets that person through their body before anything else and thus the body becomes the object of someone else's perception (van Manen, 1990). The naturalness of one's body may be lost when under someone else's gaze as for example one becomes awkward or clumsy or blushes (van Manen, 1990). Temporality does not refer to objective time but rather subjective time, for example when time appears to speed up when one is enjoying oneself (van Manen, 1990). Each person has a temporal landscape constituting temporal aspects of the past, present and future with each influencing the other (van Manen, 1990). Lastly, relationality refers to the relation one shares with others in the shared space in which they inhabit (van Manen, 1990). The first time one meets another person, the interaction is approached in a corporeal way such as through a handshake or wave (van Manen, 1990). As interactions evolve, conversational exchanges occur and one transcends oneself to become part of a communal group (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) suggests the usefulness of Merleau-Ponty's four existentials as guides for reflection in the research process because any experience has

roots in these four themes. They can be seen therefore as productive categories from which to pose phenomenological questions, stimulate reflection and produce provocative writing (van Manen, 1990). The four existentials provided a framework of importance to the research process by facilitating informed reflection on the data in order to understand the realities of the participants and their embodied lived experience in relation to people, space, time, and body as older adult alpine ski racers.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Study sites, recruitment and sampling

The targeted participants for this study were Ontario residents of the age of 65 or older, who compete in alpine ski racing. A Masters athlete can be defined as someone who is of older age who continues to compete in sport against others of similar age at competitions ranging from friendly local club events, to national and international competitions (Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, & Horton, 2010). In alpine ski racing, participants often compete in a five-year age span, beginning as young as 19 with no upper age limit. Other clubs have more general programs grouping all older adults together as Masters or adult racers. To be included in this study, participants had to be current alpine ski racers, men or women, in the province of Ontario participating at least at the club/local level of racing. Participants were required to be over the age of 65 in order for me to gain insight into this cohort of athletes.

Recruitment of individuals followed a purposeful and snowball sampling model. Purposeful sampling, often used in qualitative research, allowed me to target participants who would provide rich insight into the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers

in their continued participation in ski racing (Patton, 1990). After recruiting initial participants, I employed a snowball sampling strategy by asking participants if they had contact with other potential informers to include in my study (Patton, 1990). To recruit, I began by contacting Alpine Ontario regarding information on any Masters athletes registered through them. To compete in regional races athletes must be registered with Alpine Ontario. To access participants who compete at a local level and may not be registered with Alpine Ontario, ski clubs were contacted individually. The clubs that were targeted include those located in Collingwood, Muskoka, Southern Ontario (Caledon, London, Milton, Kitchener), and the Simcoe region (Barrie, Orillia) due to convenience to my geographical location. An advantage of being a former ski racer is the connections that I have made in the Ontario ski world. I was able to use friends and acquaintances who ski at various Ontario ski clubs as gatekeepers to help recruit and encourage participation in my study and to post flyers at various clubs. I also gained permission from the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) to insert recruitment flyers on the social media site Facebook. The flyers were posted in individual ski club's pages, the Alpine Ontario page, and the Canadian Alpine Masters group.

The number of participants recruited for this study was ten, comprised of three women and seven men between the ages of 69 and 82 (Table 1). My recruitment goal was not necessarily a set number of participants but rather a sufficient number of people to contribute to quality data and quality interpretations. Each participant was eager to share his or her lived experience of continuing to participate in the sport of ski racing in old age, which resulted in a richness of data and insight from the ten participants. As data

were collected, I noted that themes were repeating themselves after approximately six participants. I continued to collect data for four more interviews, until I perceived that was a sufficient amount of diverse but overlapping data to the point of data saturation (Steward, 2006).

Table 1

<i>Participant Demographics</i>					
<u>Name</u> (Pseudonym)	<u>Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age started</u> <u>skiing</u>	<u>Age started</u> <u>ski racing</u>	<u>Competition</u> <u>level</u>
Brian	82	M	teens	40	Local/club
Dave	77	M	25	45	Local/club
Jim	76	M	~10	As a teenager	Local/club
Karen	69	F	As a teenager	63	National
Kelly	71	F	~ 4	7	National
Ken	75	M	20	45	International
Nancy	71	F	16	40	International
Rob	73	M	5	69	National
Steve	74	M	38	42	Local/club
Todd	70	M	40	45	Local/club

3.2.2 Data collection and analysis

Many phenomenologists including van Manen (1990) suggest that there is no single correct or fixed way to conduct phenomenological research. Researchers like van Manen however suggest methods of applying phenomenology to research, and the data collection and analysis were guided by van Manen's (1990) work. van Manen's (1990) methods consist of a dynamic interplay of six activities:

1. Identifying a phenomenon that is of great interest to us and commits us to the world.

This involves a deep questioning of something in an attempt to make sense of a certain piece of human nature. It must be recognized though that the possibilities

of interpretation can never be exhausted.

2. The investigation of lived experience, rather than experience as we theorize it to be.
In other words, returning to the original experience; to the thing itself.
3. Reflecting on essential themes that help characterize the phenomenon by identifying what makes it special. The obscurities of the lived experience are brought to the surface.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. Language must be applied to the phenomenon being studied in order to linguistically describe an experience outside of its bodily context.
5. The researcher maintains a strong orientation to the question asked. The researcher cannot get sidetracked and settle for preconceived ideas divulging away from the fundamental question at hand.
6. Balancing the research context by taking into account the parts and whole. The researcher must step back to see how the various part fits into a whole.

3.2.3 Data collection

In order to investigate the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers in their continued participation in ski racing, the data collection phase involved interviewing participants. van Manen (1990) views the interview as both a way to gather narrative material to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, as well as a way to develop a conversational relationship with a participant in order to understand the meaning of an experience. The interview therefore is considered to be a co-creation; a result of interaction of interpretations and understandings between the researcher and the participant. As van Manen (1990) suggests, the interview cannot be completely open

ended, but rather must be disciplined by the fundamental questions that elicited the need for an interview in the first place. Every interview conducted therefore followed a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C) with open-ended questions designed to elicit meaningful conversation with participants, and to elicit rich descriptions of their lived experiences of continued participation in the sport of alpine ski racing. As a co-created process, veering away from the guide when necessary was expected. As van Manen (1990) expresses, the “interview tends to turn the interviewees into participants or collaborators of the research project” (p. 63). The interview followed a conversational approach, and I used the interview guide and the interview probes as a way to facilitate conversation while allowing the participants to share stories and anecdotes with me. This resulted in rich descriptions of their lived experience of their continued participation in ski racing. I also used questions such as *Can you expand on that? Tell me more about that? How did that feel?* to steer the interviewees away from using generalizations about their experiences and towards a level of concrete experience (van Manen, 1990). Prior to the interview process I engaged in conversation with participants indicating my place as an “insider” in the world of skiing via my ski racer background. I was also able to spend time skiing with six of the ten participants. I was able to ski with five of the participants in the morning prior to conducting interviews in the afternoon. I was unable to ski with my first two participants as the poor snow conditions in early January meant closures for many hills. For the last two participants we were unable to ski together because snow storms in early March meant the need to reschedule on multiple occasions and time became an issue as they were leaving for a ski holiday for three weeks. Skiing with my participants allowed me to connect with them through this shared experience and to

demonstrate my embodied knowledge of being a skier. These activities appeared to contribute to trusting relationships, and the establishment of a certain level of comfort.

Each participant was interviewed once, in a private one-on-one setting of the participant's choice, with the length of the interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and uploaded onto a password-protected computer. I personally transcribed each interview verbatim upon their completion. In total there was 144 pages of double spaced transcribed material. In addition, field notes were written following each of the interviews as a means for me to reflect on, and record, what occurred during interviews, and particularly in my interactions outside of interviews with participants on the ski hill. On occasions where I skied with participants, I wrote down reflexive notes upon entering the chalet before conducting interviews. I wrote down observations about participants that I believed would contribute to my analysis, for example the approach to speed some of the participants took by telling me to follow them in a tuck to the next hill, or conversations that occurred on the chairlift. I also wrote reflexive notes after interviews with all participants to add to my understanding of their experience, for example whether a participant was emotional, or two of the participants proudly showing me a room in their home dedicated to ski trophies and medals. I typed out my handwritten notes for clarity, and four double spaced pages in point form resulted. This data was useful as it helped to contextualize the interview data that I collected, and helped in the interpretation of data.

3.2.4 Data analysis

Using the methods of van Manen (1990), data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection as an iterative process. Thematic analysis, which is the process of

recovering themes embodied in the evolving meanings of the work, began as the data was gathered and interviews were transcribed (van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) highlights several different aspects involved in identifying themes, including a holistic approach wherein the entire text is attended to as a whole; a selective approach wherein the text is read several times and essential, revealing statements and phrases are highlighted; and a line-by-line approach wherein every sentence is analyzed for meaning. A combination of van Manen's (1990) approaches to analysis were used in conjunction with mind-mapping methods (Buzan & Buzan, 2002; Northcott, 1996; Shaw, Connelly & McWilliam, 2014). After I personally transcribed an interview, it was simultaneously listened to and read over several more times in order to really become engrossed in the participant's story and to ensure accurate transcription. Next, the transcript was read and re-read while meaningful passages, sentences, words or ideas were highlighted. I made notations of my interpretations as I read and started identifying key constructs and potential themes. This required paying close attention to the language used by participants and subsequent emerging patterns that seemed to be essential to the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers in their continued participation in ski racing.

Using the mind-mapping method, a visual representation was created for each individual interview (an example is shown in Appendix F). This visuo-spatial tool composed of themes, subthemes and my interpretations was used to organize data and reflect upon relationships within (Shaw, Connelly & McWilliam, 2014). It is a representation of the lived-experience of the individual laid out with thought by the researcher to represent the meaning of said lived-experience (Northcott, 1996). A team approach to analysis was used as my master's thesis supervisor also created mind-maps

for each transcript, allowing us to compare and contrast the similarities and differences among our interpretations. The mind-maps were created and recreated several times by combining maps my supervisor and I developed individually with the parts of each other's maps that resonated most strongly between us appearing in the final product (Appendix G). The technique of mind-mapping did not take the place of any analyses suggested by van Manen (1990) but rather was used in conjunction with van Manen's ideas by furthering the understanding of the relationships between themes in a way that mirrors the natural, non-linear thought patterns of humans (Buzan & Buzan, 2002).

My interpretive methods following van Manen's (1990) approach in combination with the mind-mapping method (Buzan & Buzan, 2002; Northcott, 1996; Shaw, Connelly & McWilliam, 2014) resulted in the "*bringing to speech* of something" (p. 32) by way of phenomenological writing. The key constructs identified through mind-mapping in individual interviews were compared in an iterative manner, and a final primary mind-map was created based on the main themes and subthemes that emerged through the analysis. The primary themes and supporting elements were then written into prose allowing the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers in their continued participation in sport to be represented through the analysis – or to be 'brought into being' as van Manen (1990) would say.

3.2.5 Ethical considerations

Issues regarding privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality often arise in phenomenological research due to the qualitative, idiographic nature of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Prior to commencing the study, ethical approval was granted by the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB). All participants

were asked to read a letter of information prior to the interview process. Written consent was obtained from each participant to ensure his or her understanding of the research process and the use of their life experiences of alpine ski racing as older adults as told. In order to uphold confidentiality and protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were used for each participant and demographic information was withheld.

3.2.6 Quality considerations

The issue of how to measure the quality of qualitative research has been widely debated (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, there are no set standards that can be applied to the qualitative research process to evaluate its quality (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013). The guidelines that govern quantitative research are in place to ensure the precision and exactness of the research design and measurements (van Manen, 1990). These parameters however do not lend themselves as an effective tool for evaluating qualitative research due to the interpretive, inherently dynamic nature of qualitative research. There exists therefore a variety of ways of assessing quality in qualitative research fitting with the diversity of approaches to said research (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013). As van Manen (1990) writes: “human science research is rigorous when it is “strong” or “hard” in a moral and spirited sense” (p.18).

In order to ensure rigour in my research, I followed the evaluative criteria suggested by de Witt and Ploeg (2006) for interpretive phenomenological research. They recommend five criteria which include: balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization. Balanced integration refers to the philosophical underpinnings of the research and its fit with the researcher, the research questions and the study at hand (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). Quality phenomenological research also

orients to philosophical concepts through research methods and within research findings (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). To ensure balanced integration in my research, I developed my methods of research drawing on the framework proposed by van Manen, and his use of some descriptive and some interpretive dimensions to a phenomenological orientation. I ensured that all themes were representative of what participants said about their lived experience of their continued participation in alpine ski racing. All themes were supported with excerpts from transcripts to ensure a balance between philosophical explanation and the voice of participants (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006).

Openness in phenomenology ensures that the researcher maintains an oriented position throughout the research process through systematic accounting for decisions made during the study (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). This was accomplished by keeping a reflexive journal and field notes during the research process to keep myself as a researcher in check and to make explicit my assumptions and pre-understandings. I used a ‘statement of self’ to help bring to light my implicit assumptions and knowledge. Further, I used reflexivity to analyze assumptions in my field notes that I believed would require explanation to non-skiers or those without an implicit understanding of ski racing.

Concreteness is described by van Manen (1997) as ‘lived throughness’ wherein he refers to the reader’s ability to find continuity between phenomena in the text and the constructs of his or her own life. During the writing phase of my research findings, I ensured concreteness by considering the lifeworld of readers, and attempting to make the writing relatable outside of the immediate context of the phenomenon (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006).

Resonance is achieved when the study findings bring about a transformative effect

on the reader whereby reading the text results in a moving experience as the reader juxtaposes his or her own lived experience (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). van Manen (1997) uses the term ‘epiphany’ in reference to resonance, saying it is the striking reverberation of phenomenological text on the reader and his or her grasp on life meaning. In order to demonstrate resonance, I focused on writing evocatively by bringing aesthetic merit into my writing (Tracy, 2010). I also ensured that my analysis was transferable in a sense so that my interpretations could be seen as valuable across different contexts by providing rich descriptions, writing accessibly and by using direct accounts from participants (Tracy, 2010).

Actualization is the recognition that in phenomenology, interpretation does not end when the study is complete, but rather will continue to be interpreted in the future (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). In order to ensure actualization in my research, the implications of the work and findings were discussed leaving room for further interpretation and future research opportunities expanding on my research.

3.3 References

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Chapter 4

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

For the older adult alpine ski racers interviewed in this study, the reasoning behind their continued participation in alpine ski racing was consistently linked to the importance of being a ski racer to their sense of self. The overarching theme of: "...ski racing is certainly a very important part of my make-up" was demonstrated by all of the participants through the manner in which they discussed the sport of ski racing as well as the way they chose to live. The phenomenological subthemes identified in this study included: "I like the feeling [of ski racing with an older body]" wherein participants discussed their embodied, emotional connection to the sport as being important to their continued participation; "You have to learn to adapt in this sport, and it's a challenge," encompassed by a discussion of embracing the difficulties of the sport of ski racing in light of the aging body; and lastly: "Skiing is absolutely a lifestyle," wherein the influence of ski racing on the daily lives of participants is discussed. A mind map depicting the overall theme and subthemes and their interrelatedness can be seen in Appendix G.

4.2 Overarching Phenomenological Theme: "*Ski racing is certainly a very important part of my make-up.*" - Kelly

The over-arching phenomenological theme that emerged from analysis of the interviews with participants was related to the importance of being a ski racer to one's

sense of self. Participants often commented on their passion and love for the sport of alpine ski racing. Terms such as “love,” “passion,” and “it’s my life,” were often used to describe the importance of skiing to the participants. One individual, Ken, even commented: “[skiing is] like a religion.” The participants had various ways of indicating the importance of being a ski racer. One participant for example compared being a ski racer to other activities in his life:

...my life has been centred around skiing for my whole life. I take skiing very seriously. In comparison I play golf in the summer... but that’s a hobby. Maybe I just don’t take it seriously, but it is still fun walking around and hitting the stupid ball [laughs]. But it doesn’t mean anything to me, not like skiing. It doesn’t even compare. Skiing is... I don’t want to sound... I don’t know, too intense, but it is my life. (Rob)

Sentiments of being “proud” emerged frequently in the interview data as participants expressed their pride in being an older adult ski racer. For many, there was pride in being physically capable in old age to still compete as a ski racer. For others there was pride in winning and training hard in order to win. As one participant indicated, some participants were proud of their ability to continue to improve in old age:

...we really have gotten much better, and being that much better really gives you a nice sense of pride. So, you know, I really am proud of what we are doing, and what we have done in the sport. And I think if you ask a lot of older people who ski they will say the same thing, if they are serious about it. And as you get older it is a lot harder, so you have to train more, and much more efficiently and there is pride in that too. The sky is the limit! (Ken)

This sentiment of feeling “proud” of being a ski racer was especially evident when it was reinforced by others, solidifying the fact that others saw them as ski racers too. Some participants indicated their pride in being talked about by their friends or family. One participant, Jim for example said:

I'd like to say it's not that important, but it is. It's just so fun. I like it when my grandkids are going up the chair with someone, and they say: “do you race?” and they say “no, but my granddad does”... It's just fun. And it gives me pride to hear them say that. It also gives you this sense of belonging.

Similarly, Karen spoke of the pride she felt when being recognized by friends outside of her ski circle:

I just think that I feel better, I feel good about myself. You know when I talk to my friends that don't ski, they cannot believe that I am still flying down the hill! [Laughs]. So it makes you feel good. And I like hearing them say that and bragging to other people about me, it's nice.

The participants were also proud of their successes in later life. Nearly all of the participants described themselves as competitive, so winning was something they cherished. As one participant, Kelly said:

...I am very competitive as a person. I have always been competitive in sport, especially skiing when I was young, but I am also competitive in my job. So that is definitely part of it. It's a good outlet for that side of me.

As Kelly indicated, ski racing offered an outlet for participants to be competitive. Similarly, Todd indicated the joy in being able to find new challenges as an older adult: “As you get older it's fun to find new challenges. I think maybe it's harder to when you

get older, but ski racing is one.” Todd and Kelly suggested that this competitive aspect of self was not always easy to express as an older adult, therefore ski racing was valued as an outlet for this dimension of self.

The participants articulated just how important being a ski racer was for their sense of self by expressing how difficult it would be to give up the sport. Some participants indicated that they planned on skiing well into their 90s. Most participants looked towards role models older than them to reassure about the possibility of skiing in their 80s and 90s. One participant, Rob, said: “They will have to drag me off the hill you know [laughs]. I won’t go lightly.” For many participants it was hard to fathom giving up the sport as they continued to be fit enough to compete and were still having fun. Being a ski racer was something that participants indicated they were still able to do successfully and therefore had no plans of giving it up.

One particular participant, Steve, demonstrated in an extreme manner how important being a ski racer was to his sense of self and how difficult it would be to give it up as he continued to ski race despite being diagnosed with a terminal disease. Steve did give up racing for two years, during which time he continued to ski, but decided he could not live without enacting the ski racer part of himself.

I always believed I would come back to it. And I never stopped skiing. And that was only because [my physician] was quite emphatic about the [danger of the] blood thinners. And I just got to this point where... the thrill and enjoyment of participation, in ski racing, had a greater impact than worrying about whether I am going to fall and be a vegetable. I knew I wanted to live the rest of my life. (Steve)

Several subthemes emerged from the interview transcripts that reinforced the importance of being a ski racer for the participants' sense of self in a more indirect way. Participants often spoke of the *feeling* in their bodies when skiing and therefore sought out opportunities to ski in order to experience the emotional, sentient aspects of the sport. In order to continue to enact their ski racer identity and be able to seek the bodily sensations they enjoy, participants also spoke of embracing the challenge of adapting as they aged. Lastly, participants discussed participation in ski racing as more than a pleasurable activity, but as a lifestyle in and of itself. For simplicity, each subtheme is examined individually despite the interrelatedness between them. The main themes discussed do not occur in a hierarchical or linear model but rather in an inseparable, supporting role to one another.

4.3 Subtheme 1: *"I like the feeling [of racing with an older body]."* - Dave

The first subtheme emerged from the discussion of what it feels like to be a ski racer with an older body. Participants expressed this in several different ways including through their emotions associated with ski racing, as a result of their perceived sentient experience while skiing, and through their discussion of physicality required in the sport. One participant, Jim, expressed the importance of the feeling associated with ski racing to his sense of self in an eloquent way:

There is this nice rhythm to it. I think it is different than other sports in that way... when you're skiing it's like this rhythm when you are making turns; right, left, right, left, almost like you are skiing to the beat of your heart. It puts me at peace.

Jim's sense of rhythm was not just a function of turning his skis back and forth; instead it echoed the rhythm of his beating heart. This internalized sensation might be seen as an embodied part of Jim's selfhood as his descriptions highlighted how his body and skis were connected and how the rhythm of skiing put him at peace.

4.3.1 Emotions

The expression of emotions by participants showed how much they love the sport. Words like "joy," "happy," "elation," "euphoric," and "bliss" were variously used to describe how they feel when ski racing. As Ken said pointedly: "Skiing makes me happy. It's as simple as that." Another participant, Dave spoke of his emotions following a run in which he followed a guide down untouched, beautiful terrain:

...when I got to the bottom, [the guide] said: "how was that?" And I was so emotional, I was almost crying. I could just tap his hand and say "it was wonderful." It was bliss... I've never felt that in any other sport or anything... ya, that was the most magnificent moment I've ever had skiing.

Others discussed their emotion of the hill in terms of a "smile," the outward expression of how they felt internally:

What I get is... just a little smile. When you make that perfect turn, or run, and you just know it was perfect... So it is just that little smile when there is a *beautiful* turn. (Steve)

So just being on the hill and being outside is... it means being alive. I have always felt that the most when I am on the mountain. It brings a smile to my face. (Karen)

Ski racing elicited many emotions amongst the participants, showing how skiing linked to their feeling states. Participants were able to recall moments of joy while skiing

with exceptional clarity. Some participants even indicated that they got “chills” just thinking about skiing. All of the participants smiled while discussing their favourite moments ski racing, showing just how much joy the sport can bring.

4.3.2 Sentient experience

The participants were quite adept at describing what it felt like to be a ski racer with an older body. All of the participants indicated that being an athlete older than 65 meant the inevitability of acknowledging their older body. Many participants discussed an increased awareness of their older body as a necessity as they needed to be able to sense their body’s limits. This heightened awareness also contributed to an ability to become engrossed in the sentient experience of ski racing. Participants discussed many different bodily sensations when ski racing, including the sensations of “flying,” “rhythm,” being “on the edge” and feeling “free.” These bodily sensations were often described in relation to internal feelings as well as the experience of their natural surroundings. For example, Dave said:

...when I die, the John Denver song “Sunshine on my Shoulder,” I tell my kids, play that one. That’s going to be it. Because that is what it’s all about. Being outside and skiing down the mountain with the sun over your shoulder. And you get into this rhythm... nothing else in your life matters at that point; it’s just you, the nature, and your legs making those turns.

Dave, along with other participants, discussed the fact that ski racing was an outdoor sport, contributing to the overall experience one feels when racing. Many participants discussed the feeling of skiing at speed. As Nancy said: “...that feeling of being fast, flying down the hill, is to me the best feeling; the adrenaline, the speed: it

results in this feeling, well like you are flying!” The sensation of “flying” was echoed among many participants. Ken articulated feeling a sense of freedom when skiing at speed: “... and really if you want to, you can ski at 100mph. And you just feel, well, totally free. Like you’re flying.” As one participant, Rob, expressed, ski racers are often barely in direct contact with the ground, suggesting that the sensation of “flying” is an apt description:

When you get going fast on the run... it’s like zooom! You are flying! It’s adrenaline in your body. I like that feeling. And sometimes when I look at a picture or something I think wow, I am really just standing on two little tiny edges and I’m going that fast! You are barely touching the ground; you are hardly connected to the snow! So you really are almost flying [laughs]!

Several participants noted the feeling of adrenaline in their bodies while skiing, and commented on the enjoyment of the adrenaline rush. Todd commented on enjoying sports like ski racing, motorcycling and mountain biking for the element of risk associated with each. As Todd said, “Skiing is risky so it is an adrenaline rush. It keeps me alive.” Many participants articulated that the risk element allowed for the feeling of an adrenaline rush.

Many of the participants found that putting words to their bodily, sentient experience was difficult. These embodied experiences were very much experienced tacitly within the body and therefore applying language to describe them was not an easy task. Often participants expressed the difficulty in describing the sensations associated with ski racing. Some participants borrowed words from others in order to explain. Brian for example stated:

I know when my son and one daughter did the downhills, I guess it was at Osler, and they'd come back and they'd say "time stops in a downhill." Just everything stops and there is nothing in your head, there are no dollar signs or anything like that, it's strictly you and the hill. And I feel that sometimes too you know, time stops...my son used to say it was like you are outside of your body. I guess that's a good way to describe it. Outside looking in. But really it just feels good. Like you are flying. It's a little euphoric actually!

Interestingly, participants also described moments when they were on "auto-pilot;" when their body was performing but they were not necessarily thinking or feeling anything in that moment. The time spent training had become so engrained in them that their bodies were able to take control. Many participants discussed old age as an advantage in some regards in ski racing because it meant that they had skied many hills and many courses. Their experiences had become tacitly ingrained in them to the point where their bodies could just take over and perform. As one participant described:

So being older now, I've done it a lot of times [laughs]! So the nervousness isn't there. It's easier to relax and just trust my ability and my skis. I think I've done it so many times that my body is sometimes just on auto-pilot... Age might be tough on the body, but it also means I have skied the course a lot more times, and I have had the chance to learn from more mistakes. So it has its benefits that way. (Jim)

4.3.3 Physicality

When asked about being a ski racer with an older body, participants often discussed feelings of empowerment over still being able to make their bodies work hard. One participant, Nancy, commented that she does not get butterflies before a race or

when she skis, but instead said: “I just have this feeling of empowerment or, like, I can do this!” The participants articulated trust in their abilities to meet the physical demands of the sport despite their awareness of their aging bodies, and in turn they expressed enjoyment toward the physical aspect of ski racing. Steve, who had been a high level athlete his entire life, described ski racing as very physical:

...it’s like the most physical thing I can think of. It’s aligning every part of your body perfectly to make it happen. And when it feels right... oh ya, it feels right. It’s power. Pure power. Power because you can make your body do that [laughs]! And it feels so perfect.

The ability to meet the physical demands of the sport of ski racing was an important part of being a ski racer as expressed by the participants. This was discussed not only in a manner of enjoying the feeling of being physically *able* to make the body work, but also as a feeling of frustration if the body was *unable* to perform physically. One participant, Nancy, discussed the frustrations she felt when she was injured and unable to ski:

So [my knee injury] was a major disappointment. I can’t think of another time that was worse, because this time my body gave up on me. You know, if it is bad conditions or that sort of thing it is an outside problem, and then this is an inside problem... It doesn’t matter how strong you might be mentally, if the physical side fails then that’s it. You’re only as strong as your body lets you be, so to speak.

Nancy was not the only participant to experience feelings of frustration when the body was unable to perform. Todd for example, expressed frustration in not being able to translate his knowledge of what to do to his aging body:

I think it's really frustrating when you're not getting something... that's the worst. When the idea of what to do is in your head but it's not translating; it's not happening. Sometimes it's like there is this disconnect between... your head and your body... I find it happens more often than it used to, that inability to make something happen in my legs or whatever. And I guess that's just a side-effect of getting older; the body is a bit slower to react

Participants' frustrations suggested how important the physical side of competing in ski racing was. A number of participants noted that other obstacles could be overcome, but physical problems took away the body's ability to enjoy the feelings and capabilities associated with ski racing. The next subtheme further discusses the physical challenges associated with an aging body as participants suggest the need to adapt in order to continue to compete.

4.4 Subtheme 2: “*You have to learn to adapt in this sport, and it's a challenge.*” - Todd

Participants frequently discussed not only the need to make adjustments as they aged, but enjoyment of the challenge of these adjustments. As one participant, Kelly, described:

I have really changed my philosophy. My first objective when I go into a ski race is self-preservation, that's rule number one, don't take crazy risks. Like I said, you

learn the consequences so being careful is key. And second objective is to have fun. So that is a little different than when you are a junior trying to get on the Ontario team. And it's a little different than trying to beat Suzy or Kathy, or whoever and trying to lose tenths of a second, that kind of thing. So Masters skiing... it is a lot different, it is very much about adapting.

Kelly's comments reflect her insights that in order to continue to remain a ski racer as she aged, she needed to change her philosophy because one's aging body simply does not permit the same level of intensity as it did in its youth. Several participants commented on the need to adjust to many aspects of the sport of Masters ski racing such as to the body itself or the conditions. As Nancy said: "...when you're talking about the feeling, it's a constant feeling of adjustment. Whether it's your body position or adjusting to the ski conditions." A number of the older adult ski racers discussed how one must embrace the challenges of the body, and the challenges of the sport, and conquer them in order to continue to ski. As Todd commented, "I think you have to embrace the challenge and love the challenge. Those who don't, don't ski when they are 60, or 70, or 80 or whatever."

4.4.1 Taking precautions

Nearly all of the participants spoke in some way about the need to be more cautious as they aged in order to avoid serious consequences such as injury, which may limit their future as ski racers. The participants spoke of skiing at high speeds, taking risks and making mistakes, but an additional dialogue took place surrounding the increased awareness of the need to be more safety conscious with age. As Todd said:

“...falls may have more, let’s say, serious consequences, but you adjust so that you ski at the ability that your body is prepared to ski at.”

Some participants discussed the need for additional physical protection for their aging bodies. Many mentioned the use of braces, tape or padding. As one participant, Brian, discussed: “I do protect myself now, which I wouldn’t have done earlier on. I have pads for the shoulders should I hit a gate, I have hip pads, they’re just like shorts but they are pads over the hips.”

The need for protection was discussed by all of the participants in some way, and for many it was protection by method of avoidance of certain aspects of the sport or avoidance of putting oneself in compromising situations. Many participants discussed the conscious decision of giving up certain aspects of the sport, for example certain disciplines like downhill or slalom, or certain terrain features like moguls, because of the difficulty these parts of the sport posed to their aging bodies. One participant, Ken, discussed his changing attitude towards the downhill event, which is the discipline where skiers reach the highest speeds:

I don’t think that I will ever do a downhill anymore because I think I am getting old for that...I’d say 10-15 years ago I was a lot more daring and into the speed events. Now I, if I know the run is an easy hill then I will go into it. If it is a steep, very fast, even Super G, I will make a decision. If it is icy, I won’t go. If the snow is nice and grippy a bit so that you can carve a turn then probably I will go.

Similarly, Dave discussed his changing attitude towards the slalom, which is the most technical of the disciplines requiring quick, short turns:

I think my slalom days are over actually, because it's a little harder on my knee. We're having slalom training this afternoon and I'm going to give it a whirl for the first time since I hurt myself; I didn't do any slalom last year. But I think my slalom days are over.

Other participants discussed protecting themselves by limiting their ski time. For some, this meant only skiing when conditions were favourable. For example, several participants with vision issues chose not to ski when the light was flat on cloudy days. As one participant Kelly stated:

I ski about twice to three times a week. Sometimes more, it's totally weather dependent. I mean this year wasn't as bad, but the last two years were horrifically cold. And my issue is with vision. I find in January to me it is dark on the hill. I don't like flat light; I have trouble seeing.

For other participants, racing as an older adult became about being efficient. As one participant, Rob noted: "...you have to really know your body, because as you get older it's about being more efficient. If you use less energy you can last longer." Many participants limited the amount of time in a day they chose to ski in order to not exhaust their bodies. As Nancy discussed, quality became more important for her than quantity:

And I find that the recovery period is more important than it ever was. So as I mentioned, we don't ski all day anymore. It's about quality so that we have some left for tomorrow, or we start to recharge our batteries for the next day.

Being able to conserve energy was a common topic among participants. Some skied less time during the day while others spent more time freeskiing and less time in physically demanding training in order to avoid exhaustion. As aging athletes, many of

the participants discussed the benefit of having more years over which to learn what their bodies needed and to learn the best way to maximize their skiing ability without suffering exhaustion.

4.4.2 Coping with pain and injuries

All of the participants commented on the inevitability of the need to cope with injuries, pain and illnesses associated with old age in order to be able to continue to ski race. For some skiers, this meant taking medication, using injections, seeing chiropractors and physiotherapists, or opting for surgery.

Often, participants indicated that they would try what they could before pain became unbearable and they had to opt for surgery. For example, Todd discussed the process of electing to have a hip replacement:

I went until I could barely walk. And taking two Celebrex a day and 8 Tylenol was just too much. And then I knew at the end of the season that if I didn't have the operation, that I wouldn't be skiing. At that point I already couldn't ride the motorcycle, because of the position you sit in on the bike, so there was no way I could ride. Riding a bicycle was getting to be a challenge too. But really I cared most about the skiing. I had decided that that was the deciding factor. As soon as I couldn't ski, or ski like I wanted to, that was it. So it was either get the operation done or I'm at home sitting on the couch, which was not going to happen.

Similarly, Nancy discussed what her decision process was leading up to a knee replacement:

Initially I didn't need surgery. I did physio like you wouldn't believe, I did everything I could, tape, brace, you name it, exercise. And finally after several

years I said we have to do something about this, because I mean I can't keep that up! I couldn't do it anymore!... I tried injections, everything. And you know after they try everything that's when you do [surgery].

Participants also discussed the need to attend to proper rehabilitation practices after injury and surgery in order to be able to return to ski racing. All participants noted the seriousness of being injured because of the effort it would take to return to ski racing afterwards. The participants discussed injuries ranging from broken bones, to concussions, to torn ligaments and dislocated shoulders. Taking the time to rehabilitate at some point in their ski racing career was therefore inevitable for all of the participants. Kelly described healing time as a Masters ski racer in comparison to what it was like as a youth racer:

Well it's slow [laughs]. And when I was younger I had injuries you know, but it wasn't really a big deal. You just bounce right back. Now it requires patience.

Patience and hard work because you aren't going to get better just sitting around.

But I think it gives you a new perspective too, you think about maybe being a bit more careful out there.

For one participant, Steve, coping with illness was a necessity in order to continue to ski. Having been diagnosed with interstitial lung disease, Steve required the use of supplemental oxygen in order to be able to perform any type of physical activity; even going up a set of stairs. For most people, this would likely end their ski racing career. But Steve indicated that ski racing was too important to give up. In order to continue to race, Steve did so with an oxygen tank on his back.

There wasn't much of a process [around the decision to keep skiing], it was just what I was going to do. For me it was like nothing changed... We just rigged up a device, my wife remembered the CamelBack. So we rigged that up, and then she sewed those straps that you saw, which are big luggage straps, to the CamelBack. You see the fear was that the oxygen tank, which is not insubstantial, would rotate across my back, and throw off my balance... So what we do is, when I race I have a slightly larger coat and I put the tank underneath so that there is no possibility of it snagging on a gate... But I just keep going. I'm not going to let something like that ruin my skiing. I just carry on.

Despite the seriousness of Steve's situation, he did not make excuses for himself, instead improvising ways to carry on; his resourcefulness perhaps a reflection of his fighting spirit as he had already outlived his life expectancy.

4.4.3 Learning

A number of participants expressed in various ways the idea that the sport of ski racing can never be conquered; ski racers can be good, but perfection is elusive. For example, Jim commented:

I think [ski racing] is an individual sport and you try your best to be precise. You can always continue to work at it. You can never perfect it. And that is really enjoyable to me, it's almost addicting. I want to keep learning and keep getting better, and as long as I keep working at it, I do. And it's such a technical sport you know, it's always changing.

The idea of ongoing learning and improvement was frequently raised. This may be a function of technical changes in the sport as Jim suggested, and possibly the

participants' changing, aging bodies as suggested by Todd who discussed the need to relearn his body after hip surgery: "...it was a learning process; learning my body over again." As Todd and Jim suggested, learning cannot be separated from the sport of ski racing. Steve furthered this sentiment by commenting:

...if I think about other sports, you are always practicing to get better at something... But skiing... working on that *turn* is lifelong. You can't master it. You can be good at it, but there is always room to improve. That also is a function of the skis changing too, it's all very technical.

As Steve mentioned, ski racing as a sport is highly technical; new technology and accompanying techniques are always emerging forcing skiers to learn new aspects of the sport. Several participants mentioned the need to adapt to shaped skis instead of straight skis over their lifetime. Others spoke of adjusting to shorter ski lengths. As Nancy, described:

It is certainly a unique sport. Especially on the technical side of things like for us skiing a few decades ago, we've had to learn to ski about 14 different times because of the technology changes. Like when we started instructing it was all about trying to control this, and perfect that. And the ski instructors started following the ski coaches' federation because they were skiing a different way. So we have had to change with the times just to keep up with the technique and the skis.

Similarly, Kelly remembered ski racing on straight skis as a child and commented on the learning that goes on in ski racing as a result of changing technology:

It is always a learning process you know; I think especially for people my age because when I raced [as a kid] it was on long straight skis [laughs]! This carving stuff is all new, but I love learning it.

Many of the participants noted their love of learning in the sport of skiing as an extension of their love of learning in other aspects of life, especially as older adults when finding new challenges is not always common. As it is necessary to adapt with the sport, this love of learning proved to be helpful for the participants in their continued participation in ski racing. Karen spoke of loving the learning aspect of ski racing just as she loved learning in school:

But let me tell you this... I get excited that I am getting better. I would say learning... well I really, really like the learning part of it. I have always liked learning; I have a good education because I liked learning in school. So it is exciting for an old lady like me! [Laughs].

Todd also spoke of enjoying the learning associated with ski racing and related it to challenges he had faced in his career:

I think... let's see, where we come from, with business backgrounds and whatnot, that if it was easy, we wouldn't bother. It's not easy. There is always something new to learn. You can never master it, at least not 100%. So it is good for the body because it's physical, I think more physical than some people realize, but it is also good for the mind because it is a challenge.

Ultimately, in order to be able to support their participation as a ski racer into old age, participants talked about learning to adapt and enjoy the challenge. Without adapting, one would not be able to compete with peers. The participants spoke of this

adaptation as hard work, but most of the participants also associated it with enjoyment. Ken for example described the improvement experienced as a result of hard work as ‘addicting:’

And another motivation it, well... you get better. I know that my skiing is over the past 3 or 4 years, is awesome to what it was before. And it’s addictive. That improvement.

In order to be successful in adapting with the sport of ski racing and with one’s aging body, participants frequently discussed living their lives in ways that allowed them to accomplish this. Being a ski racer therefore became a lifestyle. This theme of skiing being a lifestyle is examined as the next subtheme.

4.5 Subtheme 3: “*Skiing is absolutely a lifestyle.*” -Ken

All participants indicated that being a ski racer was a very important part of their make-up. As a result, the participants all chose to largely base their lives around skiing. Many indicated that the sport had become truly a lifestyle for them and often for their families as well. Some participants demonstrated this “lifestyle” through their way of living in that being a ski racer encompassed most of their time, money and effort. Many participants spoke of how skiing allowed them to spend time with family and friends, of how important it was to live a healthy life to be able to ski into old age, of being involved in the ski world outside of racing, and of making ski racing a priority in their lives. One participant, Karen, for example said:

But now that I am into [ski racing] I guess it is good and important. I think about if I were to stop doing it I would be a little lost, mostly because I have very good friends that I ski with and because of my husband of course. And then ski

vacations wouldn't happen... I guess it has become part of our lifestyle now and that is good. It makes me smile.

4.5.1 Friends and family

Like Karen, all of the participants indicated the importance of family, friends and significant others in their continued pursuit of ski racing. For many participants this meant the importance of ski racing with their husband or wife. Two sets of couples were interviewed in this study. Other participants had significant others who were also involved in the sport, but did not race. As Brian indicated:

...your partner, that's important. You have to find someone who shares your interests. If my wife didn't ski, then I wouldn't be here. Because you know, especially in the wintertime, most older couples go to Florida or something [Laughs]! No thank you, that's not for me. So you need that person to have the same passions... don't forget that.

Brian was adamant that being able to continue to ski in old age meant sharing it with your significant other. Other participants noted how important it was to them to be able to share their lifestyle and love of sport with family. Often, participants began ski racing later in life because they saw how much their children enjoyed the sport. Unlike many other sports, skiing is one in which family members of all ages can participate together. As Jim said: "...it is a great family sport. It is something you can do together, unlike other sports where someone is watching from the sidelines." For many participants, being able to spend every weekend in the winter with their grown children and grandchildren was very important to them. Skiing was their way of bringing everyone together, thereby reinforcing the meaning of being able to continue to ski in

later life. Kelly spoke of the importance of sharing her love of skiing with her family and specifically grandchildren:

And I guess the last thing I would like to add is that my grandchildren who are 5 and 6 are hooked on racing! So I am very thrilled about that. The one who is just 5 got up on the podium this year and won this trophy that is as big as he is, and it was just so exciting. So for me as a ski racer, that really is one of the biggest satisfactions that I have been able to share that with my family, and the kids honestly just love it! I mean we didn't expect that; we knew they would love skiing but the racing is just so fun!

Steve also noted how important his family was as a motivator, especially seeing his grandkids ski:

And my family. I love seeing my grandkids out on the hill, the youngest one is 3, you know if they are all red in the face on the chairlift, or they are skiing with their parents on a strap or when they let him go and he skis right into my arms and giggles.

In addition to being able to share their lifestyle with family, all of the participants noted the camaraderie found within the sport of ski racing as important. Close friendships were discussed by every participant in relation to their motivation to continue to ski race as well as their overall enjoyment of the sport. For many participants, friendships outside of the sport of ski racing were virtually non-existent as they spent so much time and effort in the ski world. For all of the participants, many of the strong friendships forged on the ski hill, translated to life outside of skiing as well. Ken spoke of how almost all of his friends were skiers, and how friendships extended outside of skiing:

I can honestly say that we don't have too many friends outside of the skiing circle. I mean in the summer time we bike, I play tennis, we started to play golf, and golf is really just to keep up with the Jones's [laughs]. Because you know we have a lot of friends, ski friends, that are playing golf right now. So it is a social thing.

Brian also spoke of friendships forged within the sport of ski racing and the closeness translated outside of skiing:

But really, what keeps me going? The people; my best friends. But the same guys, when there is no snow we get together for card games. The camaraderie is something. The racing has brought us together, and without coming up here to ski I don't think we would have the closeness that we have.

4.5.2 Healthy Living

In order to be able to continue to ski race, all of the participants noted the importance of staying fit. For the most part, the participants had been healthy, physically active individuals their whole lives. Being a ski racer added another aspect to living healthy, while also motivating participants to increase fitness outside of skiing. When asked about longevity in the sport of ski racing, almost all participants indicated the need to work hard and stay fit. For example, Jim said: "...there is also the fitness side of it. It keeps me outside, and moving. And like I said, to keep skiing I have to stay fit. I know that at my age. So it motivates me to work out." Most of the participants took up secondary sports in the off-season in order to keep them in shape in the winter. Kelly for example, participated in cycling:

...well of course the fitness part of it is very important. I cycle in the summer so that I stay in shape. I am going in the Ride to Conquer Cancer in June actually, so

I am already preparing for that. But yes, without that, skiing wouldn't really be a possibility, it's important.

Many participants discussed the importance of an all-encompassing healthy lifestyle. As Todd, indicated, it was about more than just exercising:

You have to have a pattern, a lifestyle, which is eating properly, exercising. In some ways you have to be comprehensive, you can't be singularly focused on one thing, but do a variety of things. Keep the body as best as it can be in any point in time, that's important. And if you stop doing something, the older you get the harder it is to come back. So it's just, in my mind, it's fun to be active and doing things.

The time and effort participants reported allocating to staying fit and living in a healthy manner was an indication of how much being a skier meant to them. Without this devotion to healthy living, ski racing may not have been possible at the level the participants were currently at.

4.5.3 Involvement outside of racing

Participants indicated how important the world of alpine skiing was for them in their contribution to the sport outside of racing. Almost all of the participants were involved in some way with their clubs, or through instructing, or even as ski patrollers as an additional way to connect them to the sport. Nancy, indicated how important the organizational side of ski racing was to her:

I organized ski racing at Georgian Peaks, which was my club at the time, and then moved on to being on the Alpine board and then I went to organize Ontario racing, and then Canadian racing, and then international racing. So yeah, that is

me. It is who I am. And everybody knows me; I am the mom. I kind of hold hands because a lot of people who have never done it before, who are good skiers, say “oh you guys are having so much fun can I join?” So I am the one that says ok so you do this, that is how you get your card, and I hand-hold. And people love it! So I enjoy being the centre of attention, but I also enjoy helping others.

Nancy enjoyed the sport of ski racing so much that she sacrificed her time to share this love with others. Nancy was not the only participant who loved sharing the sport with others. Out of the ten participants interviewed, nine were qualified ski instructors or coaches. Some participants had retired from instructing, while others had only recently become qualified. One participant, Todd, was very much still heavily involved with instructing and coaching. He described his enjoyment of passing on his love of the sport to others:

I just like helping people, I do like teaching. I especially like the U12 group, I coached U12 for a long, long time, and it's an exciting age because I think that's when they are truly starting to love it. But one of my goals when I'm coaching racing, safe is first, fun is second, then skills. And we ski a lot so you learn by doing. If it isn't fun, then what's the point?

The participants' expressions of involvement in the sport of skiing outside of partaking as racers indicates how their lifestyles revolve around the sport of skiing. Even when the participants were not skiing, they indicated that they were involved with the sport in some way.

4.5.4 Prioritizing

One indication of the importance of participation in ski racing was participants' decision to prioritize skiing in their lives. Many of the participants indicated that prioritizing skiing was something that was easier in later life because of their financial security, grown children, and retirement. All of the participants interviewed were retired from their careers, although some did continue to work as instructors or coaches. This freedom allowed participants to live a lifestyle conducive to being a ski racer. For example, Ken and Nancy, who were married to one another, discussed wanting to be "ski bums" once they retired, and therefore decided to move from Toronto to Collingwood to be closer to their ski club.

Several of the participants also spoke of making ski racing a financial priority. The sport of ski racing is expensive, as the participants noted, but it did not matter to the participants because they believed paying to take part in the sport should take priority. As Dave, noted: "It is not a poor man's sport! But again, that is a priority for me, so I'm going to make it happen, and make it happen for my family..." Similarly, another participant Karen said:

And then there are two things: you have time and you can afford it. When you are younger you can't do that because you have commitments! Mortgages, jobs, kids. Now we can pace ourselves and do what we want to do. It is expensive you know, but we love it so it isn't something we think twice about paying for.

Participants spent not only their money on ski racing, but their time as well, prioritizing ski racing in their daily life. Of the ten ski racers interviewed, the minimum amount of days per week they skied was three. Most often though, participants skied

more than three days per week, some even skiing six or seven days a week when the weather was nice. Ski racers as a collective often keep track of the number of days per year that they ski. This was the case for some of the participants who indicated that they ski more than 100 days in the year. Two of the participants spoke of driving two hours six days per week in the winter in order to get to Collingwood where they skied. Despite the exhaustion of leaving at five o'clock in the morning, these participants felt it was worth it when they arrived at the hill and were able to spend a day skiing with friends.

On top of spending the winter months skiing in Ontario, participants discussed taking ski trips during the winter and extending their seasons by going on ski trips in September, early December, or in the spring when Ontario ski clubs are no longer operating. All of the participants indicated that they had been on multiple ski trips in their lifetime, some to Western or Eastern Canada and USA, some to Europe, and some to South America. Occasionally these trips were for training purposes, but more often than not they were for enjoyment with family and friends. When asked about what he liked best about the sport, Rob discussed ski travel:

And [travelling] it's for the two of us, my wife and I, and it's amazing. We have friends that say "oh jeez, you ski all winter then you're going to go on a ski holiday, what's wrong with you?" [Laughs]. And I just say yes we are, definitely... And it is fun because we are together and we are staying active, and it's beautiful. The mountains are beautiful. So that I like about skiing too. You can see the world... ski the world [Laughs]! It is a good way to travel, especially together with my wife.

Rob's notion of being able to "ski the world" was a common expression among participants who really appreciated being able to translate their love of ski racing to a lifestyle of travelling and spending time with loved ones.

4.6 Summary

In summary, the lived experiences of the participants interviewed elicited one major theme: "...ski racing is certainly a very important part of my make-up." This theme was supported by three phenomenological subthemes, including: "I like the feeling [of ski racing with an older body]," "You have to learn to adapt in this sport, and it's a challenge," and "Skiing is absolutely a lifestyle." These themes were extracted from the rich stories of lived experience shared by the participants during the interview process. The implications of these findings are further considered in the discussion section that follows.

Chapter 5

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

I propose that the interviews with older adult alpine ski racers in this project suggest that continued participation in the sport of ski racing may have important implications for ski racers' sense of self, and that ski racing appears to be deeply embedded in the formation of themselves as 'athletes'. Other researchers, such as Pfister (2012), have suggested that possession of an athletic identity has proven to be of importance in relation to the continued participation in sport for Masters athletes. Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder (1993) contend that an athletic identity can be understood as the way in which people who participate in sport in a systematic way build a notion of self in relation to the interactions and emotions experienced as a result of sporting practices. The possession of an athletic identity has been argued to allow athletes to distinguish themselves from others while simultaneously providing them with a sense of belonging to a group of like-minded individuals who also consider themselves athletes (Anderson & Coleman, 2008). Tulle (2008a) described an athletic identity as being derived from an athlete's endowment with an athletic body and mind resulting from the embodiment of practice, improvement and sensation. He further argued that embodiment and identity are intertwined and inseparable. For the older adult ski racers interviewed in this study, confronting the ephemerality of their aging, athletic bodies appeared to be an important component in their continued pursuit of an athletic identity. Contrary to what one might expect, the ski racers interviewed appeared to continuously strengthen their ski

racer identities rather than lose this part of themselves as a result of old age. Their ability to do so, as well as the perceived benefits of doing so, were revealed in the themes identified in this study.

To begin with, the racers interviewed showed an impressive ability to understand and know their bodies on a heightened level, allowing them to enjoy and interpret the bodily sensations derived from ski racing. This bodily awareness appeared to be a key element in their ability to maintain a ski racer identity as old age, injury and change posed a threat, therefore requiring adjustments in order to avoid loss of sense of self. The participants expressed enjoyment in the challenge of adjusting in order to keep skiing, and put a lot of time and effort into doing so suggesting the importance of persevering in order to remain a skier.

Tulle (2008a) suggests that identity formation and enactment is a cyclical process: “one runs to run and in the process one becomes a runner, so one runs to be and remain a runner” (p. 95). Similarly, the ski racers in this study attempted to maximize their ski time through adjustments in their lifestyles in ways that allowed them to ‘be’ and ‘remain’ skiers. The following discussion will examine the findings in relation to previous works on Masters athletes in order to consider the implications of continued ski racing participation for ski racers’ sense of self and the potential importance of possessing an athletic identity to continued sport participation in old age.

5.1.1 Skiing and identity: ‘...*ski racing is certainly a very important part of my make-up*’ -Kelly

In this study, participants’ outward expression of love for the sport and pride in being a skier revealed the importance of being a skier to their identities. There was an

expression of pride among participants in relation to being able to physically compete despite old age, as well as in recognition from others. Dionigi (2002) reported similar findings in a study on Australian Masters Games participants who expressed self-satisfaction in being able to compete in sport at an older age. Recognition from others was important to participants in Dionigi's (2002) study where Masters athletes reported feelings of status due to the recognition they received in their locality, reinforcing their feelings of being someone of importance in sport. In a study on Masters athletes by Liechty, Dahlstrom, Sveinson, Stafford Son, and Rossow-Kimball (2014), participants spoke of the importance of being an athlete to their sense of self and how others viewed them. Liechty et al. (2014) suggested that acknowledgement of one's athletic identity from others not only fostered a sense of pride but also validated that part of selfhood. As Ford and Brown (2006) suggest, confirmation from others contributes to the consolidation of an athletic identity. Confirmation from others of their status as a Masters ski racer appeared to be an important aspect of the strengthening of a ski racer identity in this study as well.

The participants in this project also demonstrated their pride in being successful at sport later in life. Most of the participants described themselves as competitive and spoke of using ski racing as an outlet to enact this part of self. Competition is often viewed as integral to sport, and as Dionigi, Horton and Baker (2013a) suggested in their study on Masters athletes, performing to win in sport is important for maintaining a coherent sense of self later in life. In Dionigi et al.'s (2013a) study, athletes described their ongoing competitiveness as imperative in their perseverance of sport participation. For the participants in this study as well as previous studies, Masters sport was not only

described as fun and social, but also as about winning and an avenue for being competitive (Dionigi, 2016; Dionigi, Baker & Horton, 2011; Pfister, 2012).

The participants interviewed demonstrated how important being a ski racer was to them through their intentions to continue ski racing for as long as they lived despite the risks associated with the sport and despite diminishing capacity accompanying old age and terminal illnesses. The concept of living one's life to the fullest through ski racing was discussed and seen as more important than avoiding potential health and injury risks by quitting. The participants did not appear to be in denial about the inevitability of decline, but rather did not let that part of their lives define them. Heo, Culp, Yamada, and Won (2013) interviewed several participants in their study on the experience of competing in Senior Games and suggested that the Masters athletes interviewed had an incredible ability to persevere, some through cancer treatments, others through serious accidents, in order to remain an athlete. Dionigi et al. (2013a) also proposed in their research on Masters athletes that participants planned on competing as long as physically possible with one athlete saying "I'll do this until I die" (p. 307). These stories align with comments made by the ski racers in this study arguing for the importance of an athletic identity to the continuation of sport for older adult athletes. The participants were not willing to give up ski racing suggesting that as an important, embodied part of their being, giving it up would mean a loss of an important part of self.

The importance of being ski racers as it related to the aging process was often communicated by the participants. By being ski racers, participants appeared able to negotiate the aging process with pride, joy and a sense of purpose rather than simply as an experience of loss and unavoidable change. As Dionigi, Horton and Baker (2013b)

suggested in their study on Masters athletes, participants were able to compare themselves to their inactive peers and see the benefits of continued sport participation. Dionigi et al. (2013b) suggested that sport offered older adults a chance to be fully engaged in their later years of life through fitness, socialization, and stimulation, resulting in the ability to enact some form of control over their lives unlike their less capable, sometimes frail and dependent, peers. A sense of empowerment appeared to exist for the participants interviewed as they were able to negotiate the aging process in a positive way through ski racing, allowing them to maintain competency in old age and continue to find value in the sport. The following supporting themes suggest the importance of possessing an athletic identity towards the continued participation in sport in old age as well as the potential benefits of identifying as a Masters athlete to one's life as an older adult.

5.1.2 Embodiment in skiing: *'I like the feeling [of racing with an older body]* - Dave

Many of the ski racers interviewed discussed how they liked the way it felt to ski. This was exemplified through participants' expressions of emotion, through the sensations felt in their bodies while racing, and through their abilities to make their aging bodies do hard, physical work.

In an emotional sense, the participants commented on the joy and happiness that the sport of ski racing brought them. The remarkable clarity with which participants were able to recall joyous moments they had experienced skiing was likely a reflection on how much those moments meant to them. These findings were similar to previous findings, for example in Rathwell and Young's (2015) case study on a Masters runner, enjoyment

of running was offered as a reason for continuing to participate in sport. The participant in Rathwell and Young's (2015) study described feelings of euphoria as well as reduced negative states such as stress and anxiety while participating in sport.

The participants in this study also discussed having a heightened awareness and knowledge of their aging bodies, which in turn appeared to allow them to experience ski racing in a truly embodied fashion. As Tulle (2008a) wrote about aging runners: "although ageing appears to lead to a limiting of physicality, that is of performance, and also of mobility, it does not lead to a dulling of the physical experience of running" (p. 126). The physical experience of skiing for the participants in this study allowed for personal reflection on the sensations felt in the aging, athletic body especially in relation to the environment. Skiing is an outdoor sport meaning the element of nature cannot be ignored. The participants discussed the contribution of their surroundings to their sentient experience, for example snow conditions, weather, and the beauty of nature. Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) suggest that the relationship between the body's kinaesthetic movement to the environment results in increased bodily awareness allowing heightened sensory appreciation. A study by Phoenix and Orr (2014) examined the elements of pleasure associated with Masters sport, and suggested the importance of the sensory dimension of pleasure to sport participation for older athletes. Participants discussed the joys of smell, sight, movement, and sound in their sporting environment, implying an intimate connection between the sensual body and the surrounding landscape (Phoenix & Orr, 2014). Phoenix and Orr (2014) also demonstrated the body's connectedness to technology, namely sporting equipment, by highlighting the sensations reported by a Masters cyclist such as the way the saddle felt against his legs. The ski racers interviewed

expressed a connection between the sensations experienced and their equipment when speaking about the feelings generated by being connected to the earth through their skis. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) suggest that this haptic relationship between athlete, equipment and the environment as one touches and is touched, allows the athlete to tune into the sporting environment and apply tactile feedback to their performance.

For the ski racers interviewed, being a racer appeared to have become so much a part of them, that the motions of racing down the hill had become automatic. Several participants described the sensation as ‘being on auto-pilot’ or ‘being outside of your body looking in.’ The time and effort put into training seemed to have become so engrained that their bodies were able to take over and perform. This suggests the extent to which being a ski racer had become embodied for these athletes through the acquisition of skills in their bodies. As proposed in an article by Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2010) regarding the haptic experience of scuba divers and runners, athletes frequently develop an embodied memory of how to perform certain skills, allowing athletes to become fully attuned to their sport and environment. As Ford and Brown (2006) suggest, through practice, the body becomes inscribed with experience that can be called upon in future situations, contributing to athletic mastery. Ford and Brown (2006) propose that these embodied inscriptions become an important part of the construction of an athletic identity by giving meaning and value to the sporting body. The ski racers interviewed also discussed the value in being an older adult racer as they had more years of practice and therefore were better able to skillfully coordinate the body through courses and down hills well known to them. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) propose that movement is axiomatic to sport, meaning that practice and experience result in an embodied sense of

rhythm and timing mediated by sensations emanating from organs, ligaments, tendons, and muscles.

The ski racers interviewed also discussed the enjoyment of the physicality associated with the sport of ski racing. Many participants enjoyed the feeling of making the body work hard physically. Being able to meet the physical demands of the sport meant that the participants needed to be fully in control of their bodies, which they frequently indicated was a powerful and meaningful experience. Previous research on Masters athletes has shown similar findings, for example Rathwell and Young (2015) suggest that continuation in sport is related to enjoying the feeling of the body working during training and competition. Similarly, in Grant's (2001) study on South Pacific Masters Games athletes, participants expressed a feeling of satisfaction in being able to take charge of their bodies physically through sport. For several participants in this study, there was a communicated sense of empowerment in being able to make their older bodies perform the physically demanding components of ski racing. This sense of empowerment in being able to meet the physical demands of sport in old age has been proposed in previous studies on Masters athletes. In a study by Dionigi (2010) on women competing in the Australian Masters Games for example, the athletes interviewed expressed a sense of liberation in being able to use their bodies in powerful, effective ways. Dionigi (2010) suggested that for some women, this was a result of not being an athlete in their youth and therefore feeling empowered when using their body in old age in a physical sense. Many of the ski racers in this study were new to the sport of ski racing, and appeared to appreciate a new, physical challenge in later life as well.

The failure of the body to perform, as a result of injury for example, was commonly broached by participants in the study. The participants interviewed commented on the potential for injury to limit their ability to continue to ski with some amount of apprehension, suggesting fear in losing this part of themselves. Ronkainen, Ryba and Nesti (2013) proposed in their work on older adult runners and orienteers that the inability to compete in one's sport due to injury brought on a great deal of unease. Similarly, Tulle (2008b) suggested in his study on Masters runners that an injury was capable of throwing an athletic career as well as one's identity into doubt. Tulle (2008b) contended that older athletes must therefore work hard and fight to recover in order to maintain their identities. The need to adjust to challenging circumstances appeared to be imperative in order to avoid the threat of identity loss. This was demonstrated by the athletes in the next theme of adjusting to remain a ski racer.

5.1.3 Adapting to change: *'You have to learn to adapt in this sport, and it's a challenge'* - Todd

The participants expressed feelings of enjoyment when faced with the challenge of adjusting to the physical decline associated with an aging body as well as to changes in the sport itself. All of the participants interviewed commented on the inevitable changes associated with an aging body, but they did not necessarily see physical decline as a barrier to continuing to compete. As Tulle (2008a) wrote regarding Masters runners, "The physical competence achieved by running becomes compromised by ageing processes and this calls for a variety of strategies to protect athletic mastery and identity" (p. 116). By adjusting their philosophy and embracing the challenge of an older body, the participants were able to continue to be competitive and enjoy the sport of alpine skiing,

meanwhile maintaining their identity as a ski racer. A similar attitude was also found in Liechty et al.'s (2014) study in which 'slowing down' was seen by participants as a natural part of aging, not as a reason to halt participation, but as a reason to adapt in order to continue. Similar findings from Grant's (2001) study suggested that although loss of ability and physical ailments associated with old age were frustrating, they were not an excuse to disengage. Grant (2001) proposed that participants who had the knowledge to manage their aging bodies felt a heightened sense of empowerment, self-worth and identity.

For many of the alpine ski racers interviewed, adapting meant taking extra precautions in order to retain the ability to compete. Ski racing is a physically demanding sport wherein the body must be physically able to perform because falls can be serious. The Masters ski racers in this study indicated that this meant physically protecting themselves with extra padding, giving up certain aspects of their sport, and focusing on quality rather than quantity in order to conserve energy. Dionigi et al. (2013a) suggested in their study of Masters athletes competing at Masters Games, that possessing sport specific compensatory skills was necessary for athletes to offset decline. Some of the participants in Dionigi et al.'s (2013a) study changed sports altogether in a similar fashion to the alpine ski racers interviewed who decided to focus on certain disciplines while giving up others. Dionigi et al. (2013a) spoke of their participants' innate determination to continue to participate in sport as visible through the adjustments made in sport. In Rathwell and Young's (2015) study, the case study participant discussed the need to play smarter rather than harder as a Masters athlete. As reflected in the interviews with the alpine ski racers in this study, Rathwell & Young's (2015) participant

noted the need to be more energy efficient by focusing on technique rather than speed and power.

Coping with pain and injuries was inevitable for the older adult alpine ski racers interviewed, not only because of decline associated with their aging bodies, but also because of the physical demands of the sport. Some participants underwent surgery in order to be able to continue to remain a skier, while others took time and effort to rehabilitate from injuries and illnesses in order to return to skiing. Previous studies on Masters athletes also suggest the inevitability of injuries and recovery due to the ephemerality of the aging, athletic body (Dionigi, 2010; Grant, 2001; Tulle, 2008b). Dionigi (2010) found that many of her participants lived with chronic conditions such as arthritis or diabetes, or had undergone hip and knee replacement surgeries, and yet were able to learn how to manage their bodies and adapt to their circumstances in order to continue to compete. In Tulle's (2008b) study investigating aging runners, it was suggested that in order to maintain one's identity as a runner, one must be resourceful in the recovery process in order to evade the threat of injury. Tulle (2008b) proposed that athletes must come to know their bodies on a heightened level in order to understand when an injury or pain might be serious and might require medical intervention. The alpine ski racers commented on the need to really know one's body in order to understand their limits. As Tulle (2008b) found, a certain amount of knowledge of self-care became part of the running culture amongst participants. In order to be competent in managing injuries, the runners, similarly to the ski racers interviewed, appeared to develop cognitive resources in association with their bodily knowledge in order to control their internal desire to return to training prior to their bodies' readiness (Tulle, 2008b).

The alpine ski racers in this study also discussed the need to constantly adjust to the changing elements of the sport of ski racing. Many participants noted that ski racing is a unique sport in that it is very technical and cannot be perfected. New technology, for example, the introduction of parabolic skis, is constantly changing the sport of ski racing. For the older adults interviewed, the continuous need to learn something new in order to compete in the sport was a challenge that they expressed a great enjoyment towards. For many, this love of learning was also described in life outside of skiing. Several participants spoke of enjoying the challenge of ski racing as an older adult, while others commented on their love of learning in the context of education. Although ski racing is a very unique sport, other studies on Masters athletes also implied the need to embrace the challenge of learning new skills as an older adult in order to remain an athlete (Dionigi, 2002; Kirby & Kluge, 2013). This theme was especially evident among older adults who were new to sport as suggested by Kirby and Kluge (2013) in their study of women who began playing volleyball for the first time later in life, wherein the women appeared to share a common willingness to face the challenge of learning something new despite being older adults. Similarly, in Dionigi et al.'s (2011) study involving athletes competing at the World Masters Games, it was suggested that some athletes continued to compete in sport because competition allowed them to measure their abilities against others. Self-improvement was discussed as an important part of why Masters athletes continued to compete (Dionigi et al., 2011). The idea of needing to constantly learn new aspects of a sport in order to be able to continue to participate was not common to previous studies on Masters athletes (Dionigi et al., 2011). This perhaps has to do with the uniqueness of the nature-based sport of ski racing in comparison to other sports

whose rules, equipment and overall style of play have remained relatively stagnant (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). This may also highlight the ability of the sport of ski racing to keep older adults with a love of learning engaged.

For many of the ski racers in this study, adjusting - to be able to continue to compete - was described as a 'necessity'. The time commitment required to face the many challenges associated with being an older adult ski racer meant the need to adjust one's lifestyle in order to prioritize, as is discussed in the next subtheme.

5.1.4 Skiing as a lifestyle: '*Skiing is absolutely a lifestyle*' -Ken

The participants interviewed commented on their choice to live lives that allowed them to focus primarily on ski racing, suggesting that ski racing was a lifestyle. This was exemplified by involving family in the sport, the camaraderie experienced within the sport, by living a healthy lifestyle, by becoming involved outside of racing, and by prioritizing skiing above other aspects of life.

The emphasis on the importance of the involvement of family and friends in sport has been reported by other studies on Masters athletes. For instance, in Appleby and Dieffenbach's (2016) study on Masters cyclists, it was suggested that a large source of motivation for the athletes to continue competing as Masters was the presence of motivational others such as coaches, teammates, and supportive family members who functioned to validate and encourage the lifestyle commitment to sport. Dionigi, Fraser-Thomas and Logan (2012) studied the influences of family on the participation of Masters athletes. Similar to the alpine ski racers interviewed in this study, they proposed that having a spouse participate in sport was beneficial for maintaining a good relationship and avoiding scheduling conflicts. In contrast to the Masters skiers

interviewed in this study though, Dionigi et al. (2012) found that most of their Masters athletes preferred to train separately from their spouses rather than together. All of the ski racers with spouses interviewed commented on the importance of participating in all aspects of ski racing together. Dionigi et al. (2012) also suggested the importance of the influence of children on the continued participation of Masters athletes in sport. Some Masters athletes spoke of being motivated by training with their children (Dionigi et al., 2012). Others spoke of sport as a way to bond with their children either by getting into sport because their children enjoyed it, or by being a good role model for their children as a Masters athlete (Dionigi et al., 2012). Many of the skiers in this study spoke of trying ski racing later in life because they had watched their children compete in their youth. Others spoke of the joy they felt in being able to spend their weekends skiing with their grown children and grandchildren. Ski racing is perhaps unique in that it allows for participation of family members of all ages. Unlike many sports where parents watch their children compete from the sidelines, ski racing allows for the participation of all family members.

One of the most commonly discussed reasons for participating in Masters alpine ski racing was the camaraderie experienced within the sport. Participants discussed their strong friendships on the hill, which translated off the hill. Many discussed their lack of friends outside of the ski racing circle as a result of valuing their friendships formed on the ski hill above others. Appleby and Dieffenbach (2016) proposed similar results as many Masters cyclists discussed how their social lives were centered on the cycling world. Most felt that they did not have any meaningful social relationships outside of their cycling circle (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016). Many previous works on Masters

athletes have suggested the importance of friendships within the Masters sporting context to the continued participation in sport (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016; Dionigi et al., 2011; Heo et al., 2013; Rathwell & Young, 2015). In Heo et al.'s (2013) study on Masters athletes, participants indicated that social belongingness and interactions with other athletes were the most important reasons for continuing to compete. The camaraderie felt between teammates and other competitors formed the basis for what Heo et al. (2013) termed 'unique ethos': a social world that was created based on shared values, beliefs, sentiments, and ideals resulting in a sense of community and the formation of strong friendships within a sporting context and outside of sport. The ski racers interviewed expressed a similar sense of camaraderie and closeness on and off the hill that reflected shared values and similar mindsets.

In order to be able to continue to ski as they aged, the participants spoke of the necessity of living a healthy lifestyle. Many of the participants spoke of exercising during ski season and in the off-season to maintain their ability to not only race, but to have good results. Participants commented on the importance of staying fit as they aged, and of recognizing that some physical decline was inevitable. Grant (2001) showed similar results, where participants noted changes in the body, causing decline in physical competence. Although this was seen as frustrating, participants indicated that to some extent they could combat the ailments associated with aging via physical exercise, allowing them to continue to compete (Grant, 2001). Several participants spoke of the importance of not being singularly focused on one sport, but rather cross-training in order to maintain fitness. Some participants competed in other sports, such as cycling, during the summer months. In Rathwell and Young's (2015) case study, the participant also

discussed participation in multiple sports rather than just one sport as a way to maintain continuity in sport participation and to retain fitness. The participant chose sports strategically based on the calendar year in order to avoid conflict between sports (Rathwell & Young, 2015). For the participants in the current study, the time spent improving fitness and eating healthy food in order to progress their ski racing abilities demonstrated how important it was to be not only a ski racer, but a competitive, successful one.

The participants interviewed also showed how important being a ski racer was to their lifestyle through their involvement in sports outside of ski racing. Involvement in ski racing ranged from managing and organizing to instructing. Participants simply enjoyed being involved in all aspects of the sport, not just racing, in order to give back to the community and to become more engrossed in a ski-related lifestyle. Being involved in many aspects of the sport echoes earlier research by Lyons and Dionigi (2007) who examined the meanings of community among older adult athletes. Lyons and Dionigi (2007) reported that participants felt a sense of community equally through volunteering as through participation in the sport. Volunteering was identified as a way to give back to their sport, but also became significant in the participants' lives (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). Lyons and Dionigi (2007) found that possessing the ability to have influence over their sport was important to participants, particularly the ability to pass on knowledge to others; this finding is consistent with what the the ski instructors interviewed in this study reported.

The commitment to being a ski racer, and to this lifestyle was exemplified by the participants through their prioritization of time and money. In order to live a lifestyle that

was conducive to being a ski racer, the participants reported decisions and sacrifices that allowed them to maximize their ski time. All of the participants had the benefit of being retired and therefore had time to spend skiing. In previous studies on Masters athletes, juggling a career, children and other commitments while trying to compete in sport was shown to be difficult and often hard to overcome (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016; Dionigi, 2010; Dionigi et al., 2012; Stevenson, 2002). This is more often seen in research focusing on younger Masters athletes. For example, Appleby and Dieffenbach (2016) reported that younger Masters athletes struggle to find life balance, whereas older competitors noted fewer challenges as a result of work or family obligations. With free time available, the ski racers interviewed indicated that they spent a great deal of their life skiing. The participants discussed, with pride, skiing sometimes seven days per week and over 100 days per year. Racers went to great lengths in order to ski, sometimes driving hours before sunrise to arrive at the ski hill. In Tulle's (2008b) study on Masters runners, participants expressed a similar pride in their ability to stay disciplined and to train from 30 to 80 miles per week. Tulle (2008b) suggested that participants' lives revolved around their sport as they scheduled their daily routines such as work shifts and meals, based on their training schedule. Outside of training or racing, the ski racers interviewed also spent a great deal of time and money travelling on ski trips in order to be able to enjoy their sport in a different context with friends and family. One of the greatest enjoyments of being a ski racer noted by the participants was the ability to 'ski the world' so to speak, as ski racing functioned to improve their overall ski ability, and the capacity to ski at various venues around the world. Similarly, in Dionigi et al.'s (2011) study on Masters athletes, travel was seen as a major factor in the continuing desire to compete in sport in old age.

The Masters athletes in Dionigi et al.'s (2011) study used their sporting events as an excuse to travel and to be social.

5.1.5 Summary

The ski racers interviewed demonstrated a remarkable commitment to their sport. The time and effort put into their ski racing careers in later life were impressive and suggested how meaningful being a ski racer was to their sense of self. The enjoyment brought on by the embodied sensations of ski racing appeared to add meaning to the experience of skiing for the participants. In order to continue to ski in old age despite the threat of an aging body, the participants discussed the necessity of adjusting. By embracing the challenges of the aging body and the sport itself, the participants were able to continue to ski in old age. They adopted lifestyles suited to being a ski racer by prioritizing their time, money and personal lives, allowing for what they saw as a fulfilling, exciting stage in their lives.

5.2 Conclusion

This study explored the lived experience of older adult alpine ski racers providing insight into the reasons for continued participation in ski racing into old age. I propose that through the use of phenomenological interviews, participants suggest that being a ski racer is very important to their sense of self. Impressively, rather than losing this important part of themselves with age, the participants were able to confront the ephemerality of their aging, athletic bodies in order to make adjustments as needed to continue to be ski racers. The participants all showed an impressive knowledge and understanding of their bodies perhaps allowing them to fully experience the emotions and

sensations derived from ski racing. The subtheme of enjoying the feeling of ski racing explored this notion, suggesting the empowering ability for participants to continue to be able to use their aging bodies in a physical, powerful manner. In order to avoid a potential loss of athletic identity by no longer being able to use their bodies to ski, the participants spoke often of changing strategies and making adjustments. The challenges associated with old age and a physically demanding sport meant that the participants viewed adjustments as a necessity. The ski racers interviewed appeared to greatly enjoy the challenge of adjusting, allowing them to continue to ski race. The participants embraced a ski racer lifestyle by dedicating most of their time and effort towards skiing, showing the value placed on being a ski racer. The sport of ski racing appeared to function as a way of navigating the later years of life for the participants. By being ski racers, they were able to experience a great deal of joy and competency in old age, rather than dependency and ill health often associated with age. Identifying as a ski racer in later life therefore appears to promote continued participation in skiing and offer a sense of empowerment to participants as they negotiate the aging process.

5.3 Implications

This study offered new insight into the sport of alpine ski racing as well as Masters ski racers in their continued participation in sport. It also functioned to reinforce previous works on Masters athletes. The importance of possessing an athletic identity to continued participation in sport by older adults is not a new concept, but the lived experiences gathered from the skiers in this study have helped to reinforce this concept. Stories about identity, such as those collected from participants in this study, can serve to encourage healthy living into old age in multiple ways. Firstly, the stories of being

competitive and having fun through physical activity are inspirations for younger athletes. Traditionally, aging is associated with decline both mentally and physically. The ski racers in this study showed that alternatives to the discourse of decline do exist. Their ability to identify so strongly as athletes in later life is motivational to younger athletes, and could function to keep athletes engaged beyond their peak years. The participants interviewed in this study could help to change society's view of older adults. The participants were not in denial about old age, but were also not defined by disability, illness and decline. Instead, experiences of adversity related to old age were negotiated using sport. Ski racing provided increased quality of life for the participants by keeping them mentally and physically engaged. For older adults, sport may have the potential to add significant value to their lives by providing a sense of confidence, achievement and belonging as it did for the ski racers interviewed. Masters sport has the potential to empower older adults to use their bodies in a physical way.

Ski racing as a sport for Masters athletes was examined qualitatively for the first time in this study. The vast majority of the athletes interviewed did not begin ski racing until they were middle aged or older. Ski racing as a sport may therefore have potential to engage newcomers, especially those who are already recreational skiers. Those who competed in sport in their youth and still have competitive tendencies may especially benefit from taking up ski racing later in life as for many of the participants interviewed, it provided an environment to express this part of themselves. More ski clubs therefore should adopt Masters ski programs in order to provide an atmosphere conducive to empowering older adult racers. The ski racers interviewed continuously spoke of the importance of the relationships formed within the ski racing community. One of the

unique aspects of the sport of ski racing is the potential to involve multiple generations of family members. One way to inspire participation in old age therefore may be to involve spouses and family members. Further, the camaraderie established through skiing may also be able to encourage older adults to take up the sport of ski racing. By connecting with other racers and being welcomed into the community, important friendships may be formed thus improving the physical and social wellbeing of participants.

The lived experiences of the ski racers interviewed had particular relevance for those working with older adult athletes. For athletes looking to get into ski racing or young ski racers looking to continue racing, helping to create a network of mentors, teammates and significant others could encourage longevity in the sport. For healthcare professionals, understanding the importance of being a ski racer to current Masters athletes could help in the treatment of injuries and ailments of these individuals. When deciding how to treat injuries, physicians might consider more drastic options, such as knee and hip replacements, than for non-active seniors because of the motivation to return to sport by those who identify strongly as ski racers. Rehabilitation professionals working with Masters skiers must understand the physical requirements associated with the sport in order to treat and prevent injuries. It is also important to understand the perseverance and dedication to ski racing that Masters skiers have in order to assist their recoveries from injury and return to sport. Maintaining physical fitness was noted by participants as important in order to preserve one's identity as a ski racer. A certain amount of physical fitness is required in order to meet the demands of the sport. Without it, the sentient experience of sport might be less enticing, and racers would be threatened

with loss of identity. Encouraging physical activity outside of the sport of ski racing therefore is important, especially in the off-season.

The stories of ski racing participation unveiled in this study show the potential for ski racing as a sport to add value to the lives of older adults. Adding to much of the literature about Masters athletes, understanding the importance of possessing a ski racer identity may help encourage participation into old age.

5.4 Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this study. The qualitative nature of the study means that the results of this study are not generalizable to all Masters ski racers or Masters athletes. The sport of ski racing cannot and should not be adopted by every older adult skier. Many of the participants noted the need to enjoy the risk element of the sport. Ski racing may not be an appropriate sport for some people no matter their age for that reason. Despite many of the racers being late starters to the sport of ski racing, the vast majority had been skiers for most of their lives. The experiences of the participants in this study may not be representative of the experience of taking up the sport of skiing and ski racing together as an older adult.

This research project was limited by the timeline for data collection. The ski season is relatively short in duration, especially when snow is lacking such as during this past winter of 2016. Taking the time to ski with each participant as hoped was therefore not always possible, thus limiting opportunities to talk with participants in the field. The scope of data collection was limited to local ski clubs to facilitate participant recruitment and personal interviews. The findings are based on Masters ski racers in the Alpine Ontario South district only. Perhaps racers hailing from elsewhere in Ontario would have

different experiences. Ski racers from Eastern and Western Canada would likely have a different perspective based on a drastically different environment.

Finally, with regards to my interpretations, as a researcher with a constructivist viewpoint, I am aware of the potential for different understandings. Readers of this thesis may offer diverse interpretations of the stories collected from participants.

5.5 Future Directions

The findings of this study offer interesting opportunities for future research. One interesting avenue to explore is the influence of gender on the lived experience of Masters alpine ski racers. In this study, more men than women were interviewed. The difference in perspective from men versus women was not examined, but there may exist differences between the lived experiences of men and women alpine ski racers, offering insight as to why it may have been easier to recruit male participants.

Another interesting topic that should be examined is the lived experience of Masters alpine ski racers after retirement from ski racing. Many of the participants commented on their desire to stay involved with the sport of skiing after the need to retire from participating in the sport itself. It would be interesting to see whether involvement outside of the sport of ski racing directly could continue to foster a sense of identity for participants.

The sport of ski racing itself offers a unique platform for further qualitative inquiries. The connections between skier and nature, skier and equipment, and skier and their bodies are interesting and yet widely unexplored in research of any type. Future projects should look at the lived, embodied experience of alpine ski racers of any age in order to further understand the sport. Whether the concept of identifying strongly as a ski

racer is true for younger ski racers as it appeared to be for the older adults interviewed, should also be examined. The potential for ski racing as a sport to add to literature on nature based sport exists and has yet to be realized. The popularity of the sport of skiing across Canada is growing: Alpine Ontario alone has over 30,000 members including racers of all ages, coaches and volunteers, offering the potential for a variety of research topics (Alpine Ontario Alpin, 2016).

The sport of skiing also has many diverse avenues that could serve as interesting research opportunities. Cross-country skiing, telemark skiing, and even freeskiing rather than alpine racing could offer a different perspective as they are all related in some way, such as in their connectedness to nature and ski equipment, but would likely be participated in by another unique culture of older adults, thus resulting in unique accounts of lived experience.

The findings of this study also offer interesting opportunities for future research regarding Masters athletes. In particular, research on older adult Masters athletes (over the age of 65) is greatly lacking. The results of this study show that athletes over the age of 65 are still competing and that much can be learned from their experiences. With people living longer than ever before (Weir, Baker, & Horton, 2010), the opportunity to understand a population of adults living in a healthy, stimulating way should be seized. Sports outside of skiing should be used as a platform to understand the lived experiences of older adults further.

5.6 Personal Reflection

Undertaking this research process was a learning experience for me. From the moment of the project's conception, I was forced to reflect upon my situatedness as a ski

racer. The idea for the project stemmed from my love of ski racing as well as my interest in promoting health and wellness for older adults. The data collection phase for me was a really enjoyable process. For starters, interviewing skiers with as much of a passion for their sport as I have was an empowering experience. I was able to connect with people I had never met before through a mutual love and understanding of a sport. I also found the stories presented to me from the participants to be inspiring. I found myself eagerly awaiting their responses to my questions as they all had unique and fascinating stories. Being able to ski with the majority of participants was a highlight for me as I believe their trust in my ability to share their stories was established when they saw my ability to enact the role of a ski racer both on and off the hill. I will admit to being nervous regarding whether or not my abilities would be up to their satisfaction! Regardless, being able to spend a day skiing to me is not something I take for granted.

It was more difficult than I imagined to recognize when our conversations had become understandable only to insiders in the ski racer world. I had never had to attempt to make explicit my internal, embodied understandings before. Luckily through conversations with Dr. Connelly my thesis supervisor, I was able to identify where further clarification was needed and look internally at what my implicit knowledge was. The data analysis phase presented a new challenge that was both arduous and rewarding. Although the transcription phase was time consuming, I greatly enjoyed being able to relive the experience of the interviews and came to know my interview data on a deeper level. Condensing my data down into themes was more difficult than I thought because of the diverse nature of the participants and rich, lengthy stories I was able to collect through interviews. My supervisor, Dr. Connelly, suggested the use of mind-maps as a

tool to accompany van Manen's (1990) analysis process for identifying themes, and as a visual learner, I was grateful for the introduction to this visual tool.

The writing process for me was enjoyable. I have always enjoyed writing, and as a BSc graduate, I have not had a lot of opportunity to do so. With help from my advisory team, I undertook the hermeneutic process of writing and rewriting until my finished product emerged. I certainly learned the value in accepting help from others, especially with understanding the complexities of phenomenology and the qualitative research process overall. I am therefore quite proud of my finished product as I believe my time and effort and the dedication of my advisory committee has functioned to properly represent the stories of my amazing participants.

I am very thankful that this, as my first research endeavor, was a fun and successful project. I learned the value in choosing a topic close to my heart: even when I felt stressed, I could read the stories of participants and remember the shared experiences I had with them through a sport I love. It was much easier for me to stay interested in a topic that I understood on a deep, personal level than I think it may have been were my topic less important to my own identity. I will take the knowledge I have gained through this research project with me as I further my education at Queen's University in the fall in the Master's of Physical Therapy program. My confidence in being able to conduct research has grown immensely. I also will take the knowledge I have gained from the results of this study with me as I establish my career as a physiotherapist. I have already come to appreciate the benefit of exercise for older adults, and I believe having a deeper knowledge of what drives the unique cohort of Masters athletes to continue to participate in sport will help to establish an understanding of how to encourage the pursuit of an

active lifestyle into old age. Further, being engrossed in the ski community means that I have a great interest in being able to work with skiers specifically as a physiotherapist. I can therefore use the results of my study to promote and support lifelong participation in the sport, as well as encourage the discovery of the sport in later years. Lastly, as a ski racer, I am privileged to be able to learn from the stories of my participants and take their personal advice to heart. Selfishly, I knew this project would give me an understanding of how to remain a skier into old age. With perseverance and hard work, the participants have shown me how worthwhile the journey to becoming and remaining a Masters athlete can be in later life. I look forward to continuing to strengthen friendships through ski racing and to enjoying the sport with my future family.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



18/NOV/2015



!

Purpose!

The goal of this study is to investigate the lived experience of “identity” for older adult Masters alpine skiers as it relates to continued participation in alpine ski racing.

- ✍ What is it like to be an alpine ski racer in an older body?
- ✍ How is alpine ski racing important to who you are?

What is involved?!

Participation involves 1-2 audio recorded, in-person interviews of variable duration arranged at a time and place of your convenience.

Eligibility!

To participate, you must be 65 years or older and still competing in alpine ski racing. Level of racing can vary (from club racing, to Alpine Ontario Masters racing, to provincial or national Masters racing). Must be a resident of Ontario and English speaking.

For further details about this study or to sign up please contact Carly Litchfield!!

Carly Litchfield!
e9mail:XXXXXXXXX!
phone:XXXXXXXXX!

Carly Litchfield!
e9mail:XXXXXXXXX!
phone:XXXXXXXXX!

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Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent Form



Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

Letter of Information

Investigating the lived experience of “identity” for older adult Masters alpine skiers as it relates to continued participation in alpine ski racing

Researchers

Carly Litchfield, MSc (Candidate), BSc, Masters Student Investigator
 Denise Connelly, PhD, BScPT, Principle Investigator, Thesis Supervisor
 Anne Kinsella, PhD, OT Reg. (Ont.), Research Advisor

Introduction

My name is Carly Litchfield and I am a Masters student at the Faculty of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at The University of Western Ontario. I am also a former alpine ski racer and continue to be an avid skier. I am currently conducting qualitative research regarding the lived experiences of Masters alpine skiers and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to uncover the lived experience of “identity” for Masters alpine skiers over the age of 65 as it relates to continued participation in the sport of alpine ski racing at the local/club, provincial, or national level. Each experience will be unique and will contribute to an understanding between the relationship of identifying as an alpine skier and experiencing the sport through an older body. The information regarding the motivations for older adults to continue to participate in sport may be useful in shedding light on how to motivate sedentary adults and former athletes to discover or rediscover sport and become active in our aging society. Further, this research project will contribute a novel understanding of the sport of alpine skiing largely absent in sport related research.

Eligibility

To be eligible for this study, you must be 65 years or older. You must also compete in alpine ski racing at any level (i.e. local/club, provincial, national). All participants must be English speaking and living in Ontario.

What Does Participation in this Study Involve?

The study involves participating in 1-2 audio-recorded, in-person interviews. The number of interviews will depend on the richness of data collected and whether follow-up questions need to be asked after the first interview. Each interview will be

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conducted at a time and place agreed upon by the researcher and participant. The interviews may vary in duration but are estimated to last approximately one hour. Breaks will be offered during the interview should you require them.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. During transcription of your interview(s), I will remove any identifying information. Interview transcripts will be read during analysis of the study findings by myself and my supervisor.

All information collected for the study will remain confidential and access will only be granted to the research team. Interview data will be kept on a password-secured computer in an encrypted file. These files will be destroyed no later than 5 years after the study has been completed.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. With your interview data however, the benefits to society will include a new insight into the sport of alpine skiing, and an understanding of what may motivate older adults to remain active. This data may be useful in helping younger adults remain active into old age, helping sedentary older adults to become active, or in informing health professionals what it truly means to be an alpine skier allowing them to improve rehabilitation practices.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of the study, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics: 519-661-3036.

If you have any questions about this study or require additional information, please contact Masters student and main investigator Carly Litchfield, e-mail: XXXXXX or phone: XXXXXXXX or my thesis supervisor Denise Connelly, e-mail: XXXXXXXX or phone: XXXXXXXX should you have any questions or concerns.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Carly Litchfield

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**Investigating the lived experience of “identity” for older adult Masters alpine
skiers as it relates to continued participation in alpine ski racing**

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Signature of Research Participant: _____

Print Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Print Name: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix C: Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Biographical Information

1. What is your age?
2. What ski club do you belong to?
3. At what level do you compete in alpine ski racing?
4. When did you begin ski racing? (i.e., in your youth, as an adult, as an older adult)

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your experiences as a skier
 - Did you race as a youth or younger adult? At what level? What was that like?
 - What draws you to the sport of alpine skiing?
 - How often do you ski? Has this changed with age?
 - What do you receive from your experiences of skiing?
 - Can you describe the best moment you've ever experienced as a ski racer? What was that like for you?
 - Can you describe the worst moment you've ever experienced as a ski racer? What was that like for you?
2. What is it like being a ski racer with an older body?
 - What does it *feel* like to ski race with an older body?
 - What are some of the advantages or surprises you've noticed related to your body?
 - What are some of the challenges or setbacks you have faced related to your body?
 - How has age changed or affected your experience in ski racing?
3. Can you describe how the experience of being an alpine ski racer has informed your sense of who you are?
 - How important is the possession of a ski racer identity to you?
 - What does it feel like to know you are a ski racer?
 - How has being a skier impacted your life?
4. What motivates you to continue to ski?
 - Why do you head to the slopes?
 - Is there anything that limits your ability to continue to ski?
 - Has there ever been a time that you have given up or thought about giving up the sport? If so, why? How did you get back involved? If not, how did you keep going through responsibilities (i.e., work, family) or injury?
 - Would you say there is a "secret" to longevity in the sport of alpine skiing?
5. Take me through a typical ski run

- Can you describe your emotions and the sensations in your body as you turn down the slopes? (i.e., feel like flying, feel like floating, peaceful, fearless)
 - Can you describe your emotions and the sensations in your body as you *think* about the sport of skiing? (i.e., tingling in the spine, butterflies in the stomach, joy, excitement)
6. Is there anything else about your experience as an alpine ski racer that you would like to share?
- Do you have any further reflections?

Probes: In what way? How did that feel? Describe in more detail. Can you elaborate? Tell me more about that. What were you feeling in that moment (i.e., smell, sight, touch, movement, rhythm)? What was your experience of that? What was that like in your body (tingling in the spine, lightness, pit in stomach, dizzy, numb)? What emotions did you feel (e.g., joy, fear, exhilaration, peace)?

Appendix D: Ethics Approval



Western
Research

Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Denise Connelly
Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Physical Therapy, Western University

NMREB File Number: 107349
Study Title: Investigating the lived experience of "identity" for older adult Masters alpine skiers as it relates to continued participation in alpine ski racing
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: December 21, 2015
NMREB Expiry Date: December 21, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		2015/11/11
Instruments	Interview outline	2015/11/18
Letter of Information & Consent		2015/11/18
Recruitment Items	Recruitment flyers, modified (first one to be posted, second to appear in e-mails, etc.)	2015/11/18

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB_00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information: Erika Basile ___ Nicole Kaniki ___ Grace Kelly ___ Minna Mekhail ___ Vikki Tran ___

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files

Appendix E: Sample Interview Transcript

Interview #6: Todd

I= Interviewer

T= Todd

I: How old are you?

T: 70.

I: What ski club do you belong to?

T: Caledon Ski Club.

I: At what level do you race?

T: I race here, with the travelling Masters team, so it's basically anyone over the age of 21, but a lot of us old guys. And everyone races in their own age group. We go to Collingwood mostly. I also do a bit of houseleague racing here.

I: When did you start racing?

T: Well, I didn't start skiing until I was 40, so probably when I was... 45 or so.

I: Ok, and why did you pick up racing? What drew you to it?

T: It's exciting! And it's challenging. And a couple of my buddies were saying "oh come on and join the adult racing" so I said well, ok, and it's fun, it's challenging. As you get older it's fun to find new challenges. I think maybe it's harder to when you get older, but ski racing is one.

I: Ok, well what draws you to the sport of skiing in general?

T: Oh, well there is a freedom. Just the excitement and thrills; there is skill involved. It's one of those... I guess there is a risk involved. I do... I used to do an awful lot of mountain biking, you know single track, trails, and that, and I ride a motorcycle. So most of those things have that risk element... it's not boring! (Laughs). So skiing just fits into that lifestyle. I look at other people my age, and they are doing stuff, like, I don't know, sitting around doing crosswords! (Laughs), oh man, I couldn't be one of those guys. Skiing is risky so it is an adrenaline rush. It keeps me alive.

I: How often do you ski?

T: Typically 6 days a week. I teach, coach, and then freeski, on top of racing.

I: Neat, what do you coach?

T: I coach here, I... I had a hip replacement a year and a half ago, so I got... plus we brought in a new timing system here, so with my technical background I'm in charge of keeping the timing system going so... they didn't want to put me with a team full time because of my hip recovery, but I did U12, U10, adults in a coaching environment for a long, long time. And I love working with the young kids. I always tell the newer coaches that with the young kids, they're not really listening, just ski! Get them skiing! That's how they fall in love with it and it's how they improve at that age. And even with my adults that I instruct, it's about imitation. So I say follow me, do what I do. Because I think it is hard for some people, especially new skiers, to understand the technical side of the sport. It is heavily about the biomechanics, and that's hard to understand for some people. I even found it hard until I started instructing, just to put it in to words. You know what you want your legs and you arms to do, but it's not really always easy to put thought into action, in skiing

anyway. So watching someone else its... it's the reason I like video feedback for my skiing so you can really see what you are doing!

I: How has the amount of time you ski changed with age?

T: Well I ski more now because I'm retired! (Laughs). So ya, with retirement I'm able to ski more. Of course, I'm teaching through the week and then I take some free days up at Blue Mountain, and then in the spring we will go out West for 2 weeks and just ski out there.

I: Where do you go?

T: Fernie.

I: Oh that's great. My brother is out there for the season.

T: Instructing?

I: Yes, and loving it.

T: Ya Fernie is a fun mountain.

I: Can you describe the best moment you've experienced as a racer?

T: Hmm... the best moment, jeez. What comes to mind is this one time we were racing, with the Masters and we were late getting up there because of snow and whatnot, and then hitting the hill without even a warm up, and then leading my group! (Laughs). So, that was interesting; fun. It doesn't happen often that you go out there cold and actually ski well, especially as you get older!

I: How important is that warm-up for you as you get older?

T: Oh very. It's... I think I'm still strong, and still fit, but when you get hurt healing isn't a joke. The recovery period is, well it isn't easy. So ya, I take warm-up runs seriously. That time, going in cold, wasn't smart! It was just maybe showing me that I can still do it, my body can still perform. I was lucky though! (Laughs).

I: What do you think the worst moment was?

T: Ah, the worst... I've had some falls of course, as is the nature of the sport. But I don't think that's the worst, because that's just expected. I think it's really frustrating when you're not getting something... that's the worst. When the idea of what to do is in your head but it's not translating; it's not happening. Sometimes it's like there is this disconnect between... your head and your body. And of course now it's frustrating when you know what to do from my perspective as an instructor/coach when you can't do it yourself (laughs). That's probably the worst for me.

I: What does it feel like to ski race with an older body? Is that disconnect greater?

T: Older body? Ya maybe sometimes the disconnect is greater. I find it happens more often then it used to, that inability to make something happen in my legs or whatever. And I guess that's just a side-effect of getting older; the body is a bit slower to react! But overall... honestly, racing in an older body, it's exciting. But I will say that it is frustrating also because... a bunch of us used to always be in the top ten overall, and now we are middle of the pack because we just aren't as fast! So the strength, agility, the line that we can take... so the younger boys and girls, which from our perspective is anyone under 60 (laughs), can ski a tighter line simply because they are stronger.

I: Do you think there are any advantages with having an older body in skiing?

T: Just in the experience factor. It's a longer time period over which to learn. But you

know for us, learning is harder. But if you are diligent, and you keep working at it, you can learn! But it does take longer because the body doesn't respond as quickly. The kids I teach, they pick up things fast, but as you get older, the desire is there but the body isn't going to do it, isn't going to learn it quickly, so it's interesting. And it's the same for us in our racing. Plus the habits are there, it becomes pretty hard to break bad habits when you've been doing it for decades! (Laughs). All habits are well engrained.

I: What are some additional challenges or setbacks you've faced related to your body?

T: Well, a year and a half ago I had a hip replacement and that of course slowed me down, a lot. And leading up to that I was experiencing a lot of pain in my hip. I was taking anti-inflammatory drugs, a lot of Tylenol, just to manage the pain. And post-operation, rehabilitating, getting my joints and muscles working again took a long time. It was the doctors, everybody said, 'oh your recovery has been fast' but in my mind it was taking *forever*. They don't know my body like I do... like I said I'm not one to sit around, so ya it felt like a long time.

I: What was it like getting back on snow for the first time?

T: Um, it was really good to get back on snow. I had the operation in June, and I skied that winter. But I had concerns about would I be able to do it, would I have pain, because I had come through physio and all the other exercises I was doing, and that wasn't easy. And if I did something wrong it hurt like hell. And you know they cut you from here to here (points from hip to mid thigh), and they chop through a lot of muscle, and so all that has to grow back together, and you have to slowly gain the muscle strength back. Like I said, it's not easy, but you do it. Any movement I had to do laterally after the surgery, it kills. So when you think about snow-plowing, like when you are teaching someone... it's just brutal. But eventually it came around. And it took time, but it certainly wasn't as bad as it was before I had the operation. Like when I was doing a snow-plow with the bad hip... ugh, it was nasty.

I: What was the decision process behind getting the hip replacement? Or was it just a no-brainer?

T: Oh, well, I went until I could barely walk. And taking two Celebrex a day and 8 Tylenol was just too much. And then I knew at the end of the season that if I didn't have the operation, that I wouldn't be skiing. At that point I already couldn't ride the motorcycle, because of the position you sit in on the bike, so there was no way I could ride. Riding a bicycle was getting to be a challenge too. But really I cared most about the skiing. I had decided that that was the deciding factor. As soon as I couldn't ski, or ski like I wanted to, that was it. So it was either get the operation done or I'm at home sitting on the couch, which was not going to happen. And then of course I found a good surgeon who said "do you want to ski after? That's fine." So that was helpful that he knew I could get back to it no problem.

I: And in that first year back, what was racing like? Or did you race that year?

T: Yes I did. I was tentative because you really don't know. What's it going to feel like, is it going to be strong, how strong is it, you know the muscles are no where close to where they were and should be to ski like I do. You are exploring new territory. I mean, it's a new joint! (Laughs). So I was really adjusting to basically a

new part of my body, and that took some work. I like to think that I am one of those people who knows their body pretty well, so when there was a drastic change like that... it was a learning process; learning my body over again. But the harder you work at things the better they get, as long as you're doing the right things. So that was a big challenge!

I: How important is having a ski racer identity to you?

T: I guess it's pretty important! I hold it pretty highly as... as part of my self. To not only race, but to do well. And I love skiing with my peers here, it's all that little intergroup challenge we have between each other. And it's really good when you piss them off and beat them all! (Laughs).

I: (Laughs), that's great.

T: But by the same token, they feel the same! But we're all good with that. But ya, like I said before, I have a lot of interests, motorcycles and that, but to me the skiing... that takes the cake. Maybe, probably, because of the friendships. But I've been doing it for so long now that it's... it is just what I do.

I: How has being a skier impacted your life?

T: It's... it's taken me places, travelling, that I probably wouldn't have gone. Um... I find it to be a wonderful release. When I was working I had some pretty high pressure jobs. And when you're skiing, you're just skiing. Your mind is free. You're not worrying about what Joe Blow is doing back at the office. You're out there living the environment, so that has always been... it's just a huge, nice release. It opens your mind but your mind doesn't drift... if that makes sense (laughs). It's like your body is free to act out the frustrations you've built up like at work, but your mind is just enjoying the environment, and the sights and the adrenaline. Sometimes a little anger in your skiing is fast! (Laughs). But ya, skiing is almost, you could say therapeutic for me. And motorcycles and stuff like that is the same for me.

I: What motivates you to continue to ski?

T: As you get older, and your days are numbered, you have to do what you can before you can't. And keep doing it as best you can, as much as you can, and never give up, because at one point, we won't be able to. And our days are numbered. Every year I think, will I be able to do this? Will I be able to do that? Because at some point I won't, so I have to do it now. So we just keep going, we have to! You have to continue that push. So I guess what motivates me is... this is sounding a bit morbid! (Laughs). But it's knowing that I'm not going to be here forever and that this sport is something great, so I shouldn't take it for granted while my body can still do it.

I: Has there ever been a time when you've thought about giving up the sport?

T: No (laughs). Never.

I: Would you say there is a secret to longevity in the sport?

T: I think... let's see, where we come from, with business backgrounds and whatnot, that if it was easy, we wouldn't bother. It's not easy. There is always something new to learn. You can never master it, at least not 100%. So it is good for the body because it's physical, I think more physical than some people realize, but it is also good for the mind because it is a challenge. So we want the continuing challenges, the experiences, and being an open sport when things change like today, the weather went from sunny and soft snow to cloudy and ice, and I'm with my

students, I say well good, I want you challenged. And it may not be comfortable. But I tell them, because you're good, you're still on your feet. It helps your balance, and just your skill overall. You have to learn to adapt in this sport, and it's a challenge. The nature part of it... well here we are in Southern Ontario and it rained all week, so that tells you something. I kind of like that about skiing though, that it is a little bit left up to chance, to the weather Gods! (Laughs). It makes you appreciate nature and the environment more because it is such a big part of the sport. But ya, what was the question? About longevity?

I: Yes.

T: Right, I think you have to embrace the challenge and love the challenge. Those who don't, don't ski when they are 60, or 70, or 80 or whatever. And embrace the nature. You can say you are only going to ski on perfect sunny days with perfect snow, but that means you aren't going to ski a lot! (Laughs).

I: Can you take me through a perfect run?

T: (Laughs), well you certainly wouldn't be experiencing that with the snow today! If you do a run where every turn feels perfect, you're slow. It means you're not on the edge enough, meaning not pushing the limits, so it feels great to arc the perfect turn, but you know you're slow (laughs). It means I haven't done a tight enough line, and that's typically one of my bad habits, rounding out the course too much.

I: Can you tell me more about the fastest run then? What does that feel like?

T: I will say, the fastest run... it feels like... you are all over the place; like you are barely holding on. I sometimes find that I go into this state. It's like you train all the time and you are thinking all the time about what to do. But in a racecourse... you're not thinking. It's over so fast actually! (Laughs). It's like you're at the top then all of the sudden the bottom! I think when you train... the skills become part of you. So when you race your head doesn't need to be in control.

I: That's a great description. So you're not thinking a lot when you are racing?

T: No, I think my body is just doing. I also don't hear anything around me. I have heard a lot of people say that, it's like the crowd isn't even there.

I: Yes, I experience that too.

T: It's like a quiet that comes over you, even though it's not really quiet! (laughs).

I: Ok, what are you like in the start gate?

T: Pretty calm, trying to focus on just getting out of the gate without tripping the wand too fast, and you know with the... it used to be that I could go from the start to half way down the ramp before I touched snow, but that ain't happening no more! (Laughs). But it's just getting out as clean as possible, thinking where is my line, where is the first gate, setting up the next gate. And ya, I'm pretty focused up there.

I: What are you feeling when you are up there? Do you get nervous?

T: No, I don't get nervous. But I let myself get excited. So you let... you let your pulse rate come up, because you know, it's good. And then you make the body ready, because it is going to have to work, and you get to the bottom of a 23 second course and you are huffing and puffing you can say ya, I worked! (Laughs).

I: How do you get the body ready?

T: Oh just making sure my muscles are warm, stomping around, stretching, definitely stretching!

I: Are you ever nervous about the body not working on a run, or just falling in general as you get older?

T: No I don't have a fear of falling. I think when you're in a course, all you see is, where is the next gate. It's like a tunnel that you're in, and you're just... like I said everything else goes away. I don't hear or see the people around me... It's like a whole different world that belongs only to you. So you just expect your body to work, you can't go in expecting to fall or else you tense up and lose your focus.

I: Do you ever think about a time when you may not be able to ski anymore?

T: Well like I said, you do it while you can. And as long as we stay physically active for as long as we can with our skiing and other associated activities, then we will be skiing longer. Hopefully forever. And I know guys that ski in their 90s... so you can do it. And of course there are challenges, especially physical limitations, but they're still out there. And falls may have more, let's say, serious consequences, but you adjust so that you ski at the ability that your body is prepared to ski at. I don't think it's something that I've really thought much about yet because I am still able you know? I don't really feel old... maybe in ten years I might have a different answer! (Laughs).

I: Anything else you want to add?

T: Just that I think you can be healthy as you get older, but it has to start at a young age. You have to have a pattern, a lifestyle, which is eating properly, exercising. In some ways you have to be comprehensive, you can't be singularly focused on one thing, but do a variety of things. Keep the body as best as it can be in any point in time, that's important. And if you stop doing something, the older you get the harder it is to come back. So it's just, in my mind, it's fun to be active and doing things. And of course it's loving skiing. One of my goals with my students is to bring that love of skiing to them and it's... you want them to feel confident, safe, in control.

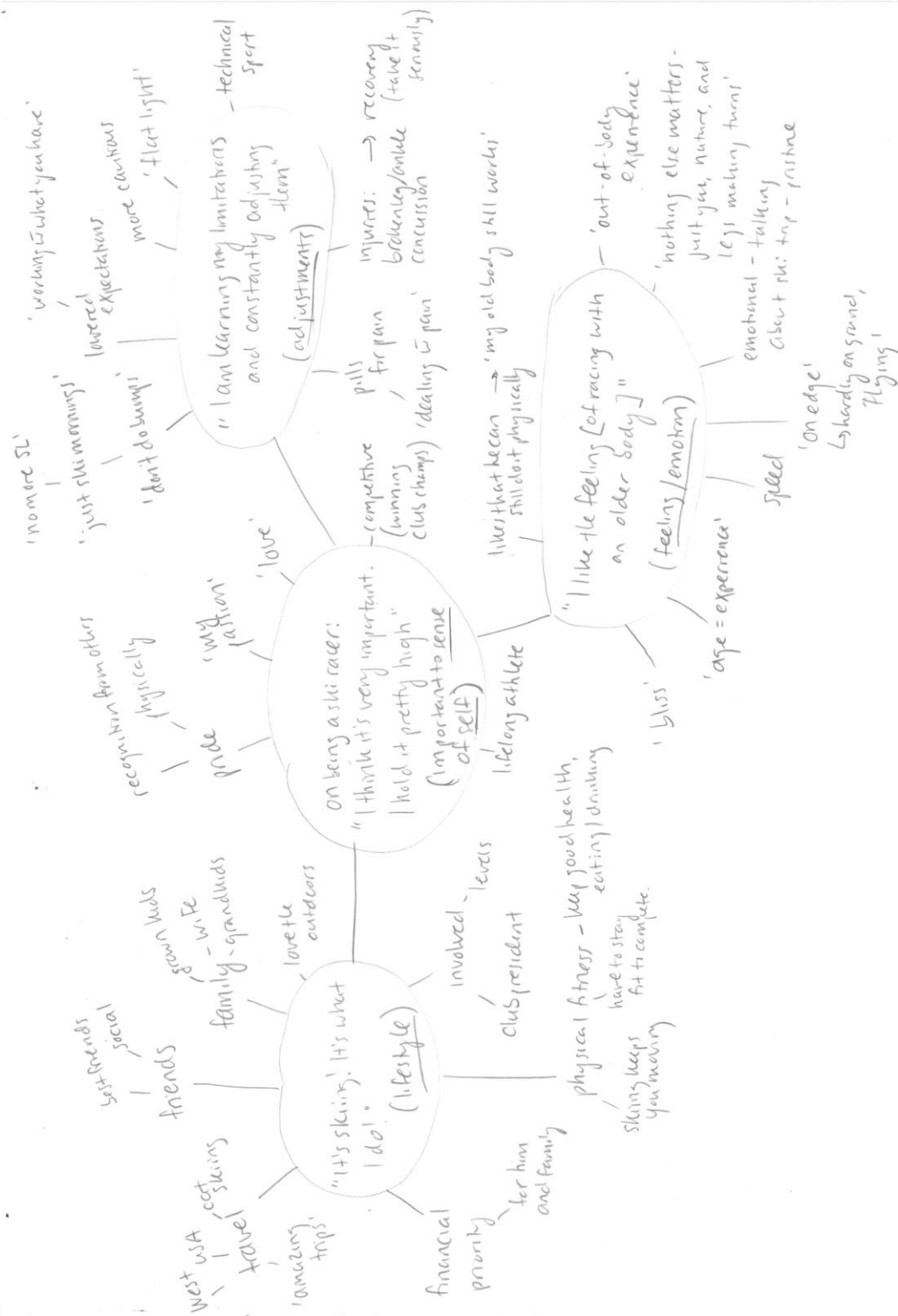
I: What do you like best about teaching?

T: Um... I just like helping people, I do like teaching. I especially like the U12 group, I coached U12 for a long, long time, and it's an exciting age because I think that's when they are truly starting to love it. But one of my goals when I'm coaching racing, safe is first, fun is second, then skills. And we ski a lot so you learn by doing. If it isn't fun then what's the point?

I: Good point, I agree!

T: Ok thank you, I better get back out there for my next lesson!

Appendix F: Sample Mind-Map of Individual Participant: Dave



Mind-Map: Dave

Appendix G: Consolidated Mind-Map: Overarching Theme and Subthemes



Curriculum Vitae

Name: Carly Litchfield

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2009-2013 B.Sc Kinesiology

University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2014-2016 M.Sc (c)

Honours and Awards: Graduate Entrance Scholarship
University of Western Ontario
2014-2015, 2015-2016

Honours Bachelor of Science with distinction
University of Western Ontario
2013

Related Work Experience: Physiotherapy Assistant
Closing the Gap Health Care Group
Huntsville, Ontario
2015- present

SMART Exercise Leader
Victorian Order of Nurses
Muskoka, Ontario; London, Ontario
2013-2015