

# Leading Competitor Masters Athletes: Identities and the Road to Success

By

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## **Abstract**

This project sought to explore identities used by leading competitor master level runners in order for them to continue down the road of success. The following research question was explored: How do leading competitor masters level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in? The participants were three leading competitor master level athletes (age 50+), who all reside in Sudbury, Ontario. Artefacts brought the project to a deeper level. An inductive thematic analysis was carried out. Themes and sub-themes highlighted specific ways each masters' athlete navigated their running journey to allow them to maintain their competitiveness as a leading competitor. In conclusion, the study discussed the importance of the athletic identity: how it functioned, shifted, and changed over time to allow the athletes to navigate their other identities and go through processes such as identity management.

*Keywords:* masters athlete, leading competitor, athletic identity, post-positivism, critical realism, artefacts, descriptions

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter includes an introduction into all the topics covered. Following the introduction, in depth insights on holistic living later in life, “masters category” as an age, not a position, and masters athletes: gaining traction in society, and long distance running will be discussed to introduce the big ideas of the current research project. After a brief literature introduction, the purpose of the study, followed by the significance, the study’s delimitations and, finally, operational definitions of the current study will be shared.

Long distance runners of all ages have been training to be fitter, stronger, and ultimately faster than their previous selves and the other competitors in their field. Long distance runners participate in a unique sport where age does not restrict the athletes in terms of their eligibility for the sport; many athletes continue to participate in competitive long distance running for as long as their bodies will allow. With the increase in the aging population due to the baby boomer generation, society has been presented with an abundant aging population, where each individual describes their own life path, including their choices of careers, family lifestyles, and athletic pursuits to name a few (Baker et al., 2010; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). Considering the abundant aging population and the age limit-less sport of long distance running, society has seen an upsurge in the number of the aging population who participate in long distance running, whether it is competitive or recreational (Shipway & Holloway, 2016). Using a holistic lens, investigating these lives has allowed for a great increase in the knowledge available to the masters level long distance runners population. A holistic lens allowed me, as the researcher to investigate “the growth and improvement of the athlete as a human being” (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, p. 227) as well as the personal development, quality of life, and performance enhancement of that athlete (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). The term ‘masters’ has been assigned to a specific athlete population

who fall into a defined age category; however, the definition of a masters level athlete is fluid from sport to sport. This fluidity is due to the unique physical requirements of each sport and the general age of the encompassing athletes. Throughout the current project the word ‘descriptions’ was used instead of the word ‘experiences’ due to the post-positivist view on how the truth can be accessed, as we can only gain access to the descriptions of other’s experiences rather than the experience itself.

### **Holistic Living in Later Life**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there have been discussions of holistic living. This concept of holistic living has been applied to the life course using two methods: one was the understanding that the individual has come from their own personal life path requiring the use of a holistic lens to gain an understanding of this path and, secondly, holistic living was used to describe an idea of how each individual chose to live their life in terms of what was important to them. Throughout the life path of an individual, there were milestones (e.g., graduating from high school or post secondary education, starting a family, retiring from a career) that have been recognized by society and were used as markers to indicate the beginning or the end of a phase of life. At the various stages of one’s life, these milestones fluctuate in terms of their importance to the life of the individual. The term ‘holistic’ was used to describe “the idea that the whole is more than merely the sum of its parts” (dictionary.com, holistic section, para. 1). As the aging population in developed countries continues to increase, holistic living in later life is often becoming more frequently investigated and relevant to today’s society (Joseph Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, & Horton, 2010; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). Although in developed countries, life’s milestones were similar to one another, there was a great range of individual differences that were described leading each individual to a very unique life path (e.g., physical, emotional, and social changes)

that has led them to their current lifestyle. Physical changes in the body are often used as identifiers for the aging process, although the active / competitive aging body “should be considered more than a physical object, as it represents a conscious, feeling, thinking and reflective self” (Grant, 2001, p. 777). This population offers a great deal of knowledge to be navigated and understood to gain a better understanding of the various avenues of life and influential circumstances, such as cultural and societal trends and expectations (Dionigi, 2006a; Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Nesti, 2013). Older people have negotiated, experienced, and fulfilled multiple roles (e.g., career, family), as well as experienced paths that they have chosen to navigate or ones that have been prescribed to them. Holistic living was understood in two different ways; the first was that it incorporated educational, career, family, and athletic paths, including other avenues that were unique to the individual. The second was with consideration to what would be experienced internally such as their personality, emotional make-up, beliefs, values and the effects the environment had on them (Grant & Kluge, 2007). This is illustrated in the individual’s desire to live and fulfill many aspects of life. The individual may wish to fulfill many roles (e.g., relationship role, athlete role, occupational role) within their lifetime; the prevalence of these roles would be fluid throughout their life. This would have defined an individual who was choosing to live a holistic life, fulfilling multiple complementary and sometimes conflicting roles throughout their lifetime.

### **“Masters Category” as an Age, Not a Position**

The human life span has often been divided into three categories based on chronological age; these categories are commonly known and recognized as youth, middle age, and old age (Shinan-Altman & Werner, 2018). Age and the physical condition of the aging body highly affect individuals’ desire and willingness to participate in competitive sport. Although athletics

acknowledges the chronological age divisions, they have also developed their own age classifications for athletes who are significantly different than the chronological categories, but are also acknowledged and highly accepted. Athletics was the only aspect of life “where a twenty-seven-year-old man can be referred to as a ‘veteran’, and a thirty-five-year-old as an ‘old man’” (Messner, 1992, p. 112). Athletics’ method of classifying the athlete population in terms of their age uses terms that are commonly associated with the elderly population (e.g., ‘masters’ and ‘veterans’) to a younger group of individuals who are competing in sport (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007).

In athletics, the terms ‘masters’ and ‘veterans’ have a much larger accepted age range than when those terms are used to describe the general population. Masters level athletes, commonly known as masters’ athletes (MA), are defined by various sport governing bodies. Sport governing bodies have created an accepted definition of ‘masters’ that is then applied to their sport to ensure consistency in the standards and inclusion criteria. Canadian Masters Athletics (CMA), in agreement with World Masters Athletics (WMA) and the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) has defined “masters” to include “women and men 35 [years old] and over” (athletics.ca, Masters section, para. 2). This definition is specific to athletics, “each sport’s national or international governing body determines the age to define a masters’ athlete” (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008, p. 31). Each sport’s governing body generally determined the age to be considered as a ‘masters’ “by the age at which the world record in open elite peaks” (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008, p. 31). For the purpose of their research, Reaburn and Dascombe (2008) defined master athletes as athletes who were “typically older than 35 years of age and systematically train for, and compete in, organized forms of sport specifically designed for older adults” (p. 31). Due to the diverse age range in the masters sport population, divisions

have been created to conform to the idea of age-group racing and age-graded performances. Generally, in terms of athletics, the age-groups were divided into five-year categories; started at age of 35 and ranging as wide to include the oldest competitor (Suominen, 2011). Suominen (2011) offered his definition whereby “master athletes are active exercisers and competitors who participate in international, national, or local competitions for ‘masters’, ‘veterans’, or ‘seniors’” (p. 37).

### **Masters Athletes: Gaining Traction in Society**

The aging population in developed countries, such as Canada, has been on a steady increase due to the abundant baby boomer generation growing old together (Baker et al., 2010; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). This demographic shift in a developed country’s aging population has gained the “undivided attention of politicians, researchers, [and] community groups as the everyday needs and demands of older people change” (Grant & Kluge, 2007, p. 400). The health care system developed national standards and programs that were designed to assist the elderly population to live longer and healthier lives, while they strive to maintain a high level of independence. With the health of our aging population in the forefront of health care policy makers’ minds; attention has been drawn to the concept of sport participation and its ability to facilitate positive development not only for youth, but across the lifespan well into the elderly years (Baker et al., 2010). With this being of interest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been an increase of information and data generated and collected on the benefits of physical activity with the targeted audience of those in mid- and later-adulthood. With this, the level of participation in physical activity increased in the aging population (Baker et al., 2010). This increase was also witnessed in the participation of masters athletes who competed in sport; locally, nationally, or internationally (Lepers & Cattagni, 2012; Suominen, 2011). Masters level athletic competitions have

successfully provided “a continuum from youth and adult sport to training and competition in old age” (Suominen, 2011, p. 38). Along with the increase seen within the aging population, there has been an increase in the life expectancy due to the advancements made in technology. It is now said that “children born today in the most advantaged countries in the world can expect to live upwards of 80 years” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 3). With the combination of increased life expectancy and society’s attention focused on the health and wellness of the aging population, the perfect opportunity has been created for older individuals to participate in both recreational and competitive masters level sports.

### **Long Distance Running (Half and Full Marathons)**

Long distance running is measured using ‘standardized race distances,’ which provide uniformity and acknowledgment to each race distance (Ronkainen et al., 2013). Long distance running, with focus on the distances of a half marathon (21.1km) and a full marathon (42.2km) have recently been met with an upswing of interest, partially due to society’s attempts to promote a healthy lifestyle (Shipway & Holloway, 2016). Endurance sport has proven its advantages in relation to overall health on many occasions (Kusy & Zielinski, 2005). Due to the increase in participation that has been seen across multiple age groups, the social world of long distance running expanded in numerous ways, fueled by the significant upsurge of participants (Shipway & Holloway, 2016). Long distance marathon running has been described as “an extreme sport on account of high demands on aerobic power and muscle endurance” (Suominen, 2011, p. 39) which allowed it to stand out as an intense sport that is not attempted by all people. “Distance running is unusual, though not unique, in that it demands continuity of effort rarely found in other sports” (Shipway & Holloway, 2016, p. 78). Long distance running has been recognized as a sport that requires the participants to follow an intense training schedule in order to improve

running times and to become fitter runners; this training schedule often filled much of the individual's free time. With the training and performance requirements for the participants of long distance running so specific yet continuous, the running sub-culture is unique to the individuals who devote their time and effort and who consider themselves to be "distance runners" and use the term "runner" as a strong identifier. The distance running sub-culture has identified "certain values, dispositions, and characteristics [that are] highly valorized, including the qualities of stoicism and endurance" (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007, p. 338). In 2007, Allen-Collinson and Hockey suggested that "the praxis of distance running [was] intimately connected with endurance; tolerating fatigue, discomfort and pain constitute an integral part of everyday training routines" (p. 338). Due to the specific means of performance, the long distance running sub-culture has also "been shown to be experienced both as alienating and oppressing (Marnham, 1980) and empowering (Chalmers, 2005)" (Ronkainen et al., 2013, p. 389) due to the previously stated praxis. Long distance competitive running tends to be a sport to which athletes can fully dedicate themselves, realizing the amount of commitment this sport takes in order to be trained properly and to be successful when it comes to race day. Long distance running holds great power for individuals who incorporate it regularly into their lifestyle, as long distance running allows for the individual to commit to the identity of a runner. A factor that influences the athletes who are dedicated to long distance running is the negotiations that occur within the athlete's internal experience, the external rewards, and how they flourish and resonate within each athlete. Masters athletes who have and continue to incorporate long distance running into their lifestyles and identify as distance runners often describe a decline in external rewards as the "inner experience became more important" (Ronkainen et al., 2013, p. 394).



## **Purpose of the Study**

Humans may be individualistic and/or collective beings, potentially with a grand sense of community that allows for the formation of individual identities, cultures, and sub-cultures around the world. The sporting world has been investigated by many researchers, with the focus on various aspects, such as the participants, the human body, the perceived experiences – both positive and negative, the sub-cultures, and identities, specifically the athletic identity. Human beings navigate life where various identities are expressed throughout their lifetime; some identities were common between cultures (and sub-cultures) and some identities were individualistic within those cultures. Identities are “shifting, not fixed, chosen, not given, and multiple, not singular” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 6), making them very complex and unique to each individual’s life story. Career, family, and athletic identities are examples of identities that are commonly expressed in an outward manner. Narrowing the focus to long distance running, researchers have previously set out to investigate long distance running athletic identity (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Ronkainen et al., 2013), the running sub-culture that was evident to the participants and could be distinguished by non-members in terms of athletic career development (Ronkainen et al., 2013) and in terms of the positive and negative / challenging aspects of the sub-culture (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007), the uniqueness of long distance running as a sport (Shipway & Holloway, 2016; Suominen, 2011), the uniqueness of experiences that are available through long distance running (Shipway & Holloway, 2016), and the various types of masters athletes (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015; Suominen, 2011). With all of the research that has been conducted to date, the literature gap lies within the lack of research conducted on athletic identity throughout a masters athlete’s lifetime and with a snapshot in time focused on their current destination; there is also a lack of literature on the masters athletes’ competitive

descriptions (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016). Using the holistic lens, viewing the individual's life as a whole, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the masters' athlete described the athletic identity as it weaved in and out of their life and how they currently view their life as a runner, now that they are considered to be a masters athlete (age 50+). Specific to this research and to my understanding, little research has been done on the leading competitor masters level half and full marathon runners who do the majority of their training in remote locations, such as Sudbury, Ontario. The purpose of this research was to identify the salient identities, as well as the importance and strength of the athletic identity throughout the athletes' life, and investigate the masters athletes' current destination as a snapshot in time. The half marathon and full marathon distance runners have been chosen as the focus for this research due to the fact that long distance endeavours require a great deal of commitment. The longer, endurance and stamina focused race distances require a unique physical ability that is more often maintained by the aging athlete, than what shorter race distances require.

### **Significance of the Study**

The masters level competitors' descriptions have been overlooked in the past. Research has been conducted on the masters athlete, but this is usually done with the focus on leisure sport or participation in physical activity (Dionigi, 2006a; Shipway & Holloway, 2016; Witcher, Holt, Spence, & O'Brien Cousins, 2007). The dedication of the masters' population to their role of a leading competitor offers a great deal of insight into the lives they have had and the way they have described their athletic identity and the experiences that they continue to have as a masters (50+) athlete. This cohort of masters athletes was chosen because it is at the age of 50 where physical declines have been witnessed and described. Within sport psychology, focusing on identity, the masters level (age 50+) leading competitors in the half and full marathon distances

who reside within Sudbury, Ontario have not been investigated and therefore may offer a great deal of novel findings about masters level sport. Research on this population is important in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship that these athletes have had with their athletic identity through life. The sharing of this knowledge would offer younger athletes a glimpse into their own future, if they desire to continue their competitive sport participation. Sudbury, Ontario is home to a great number of masters level long distance runners. These runners religiously train and race the half and full marathon distances, creating a unique and tight knit running, training, and racing sub-culture that is special to its members. This population presents a unique yet important group of dedicated athletes who deserve to be understood in order to benefit themselves and society by potentially changing the way society looks at masters level athletes. A better understanding of this leading competitor masters level athletic population would benefit masters level runners who may find strength in similarities in the descriptions of their experiences and ways in which these athletes are able to remain leading competitors in their respective age groups. In order to gain insight into the role that the athletes' athletic identity, among other important identities, played in their lives in the earlier years, as well as in their current destination, it is necessary that research investigates this population to explore the salience of the athletic identity at the two points in time, and how it has allowed them to remain leading competitors in their age group, regardless of their athletic path to reach this destination. The athletes' paths could have varied due to the type of master level athlete they are, whether it be a serious lifetime master athlete, a new-to-sport master athlete, or a born-again master athlete where they are rededicating themselves to their previous athletic identity (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015).

## **Delimitations**

For the current research, the participants of interest were those who met the following criteria. The participants live and train in Sudbury Ontario, were over the age of 50 years, have completed a half or full marathon at least once in the last three years (after the age of 50), and who met the criteria of being a ‘leading competitor’ in terms of this study. By narrowing the participants down to those who live and train in Sudbury, Ontario, the data collected were representative of people exposed to the unique geographical location of Sudbury, as well as the uncommon extreme weather patterns, such as extreme cold in the long winter months. Further narrowing down the population to those who are 50 and above (due to increased descriptions of physical decline) and are still maintaining a training schedule, to allow them to successfully complete various long distance races, either a half or a full marathon, produced information that is again representative of the specific population. The final criterion was the participants being considered ‘leading competitors’ within their age group. The term ‘leading competitor’ is an extension of the term ‘competitive recreational athlete,’ The term ‘competitive recreational athlete’ was defined as an individual who chooses to participate in sport in their free time, their achievements and excellence within sport are valued, and their participation must fit into the entirety of their lives (Whalen, et al., 1995). For the current project, the term ‘leading competitor’ was chosen because it best describes the higher performance athletes within the ‘competitive recreational athlete’ category.

With all participants being ‘leading competitors,’ the themes are relevant to the top end of the recreational-competitive spectrum, which is an exclusive population on its own. Meeting all these criteria was crucial to the current research project, ensuring that the results were representative of the very specific, tight knit population, who were able to provide in-depth

detailed information on their relationship with their athletic identity. To gain knowledge about this population, in terms of the relationship they have had with their athletic identity in the past, and how they view it now, as a masters level runner, will lead to greater insights on how they function as individuals, focusing on their identities and may hint at how they function as a social world or within the social world of long distance running.

### **Operational Definitions**

For the current project, several operational definitions have been defined for clarity throughout. These terms include ‘artefacts’, ‘athletic identity’, ‘critical realism’, ‘descriptions’, ‘leading competitor’, ‘masters athlete’, and ‘post-positivism’.

**Artefacts.** Artefacts were used to help facilitate the conversational interviews by encouraging the participants to elicit information, reveal insights that were human-centered, and the artefacts were used to “capture and facilitate the fluid, temporal aspects of interaction and conversation” (Akama et al., 2007, p. 174; Krippendorff, 2005). For the current research project, the term ‘artefact’ was used to describe any item that the participant brought into the interview that held value to the participant and that would encourage them to share detailed stories about the item and their running journey. “The use of artefacts facilitated interaction [that is] not available using traditional approaches where the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee answers what he or she hears” (Akama et al., 2007, p. 175).

**Athletic identity.** The term ‘athletic identity’ is the narrow term used to describe the part of an individual who relates closely to an athletic role (Cosh, Crabb, & LeCouteur, 2013). An “athletic identity cannot be understood in isolation from [sport] culture and language that promotes certain understanding of self and the sport world” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 129).

This reinforces the need for consideration of the social context when investigating the athletic identity, due to the high level of connection the identity and social world have with one another.

**Critical realism.** ‘Critical realism’ is the ontological viewpoint that assumes “the world exists independently of our knowledge of it” (Sayer, 1992, p. 5). “Critical realists accept that reality is socially constructed.... but not entirely so.... The “real” world breaks through and sometime destroys the complex stories that we create in order to understand and explain the situations we research” (Easton, 2010, p. 120). As a critical realist, it is the events or outcomes, “the external and visible behaviours of people, systems and things as they occur, or as they have happened” (Easton, 2010, p. 120) that are of interest. Under the wider umbrella of social science, “it is important to acknowledge that most social science research methods create data that are reported rather than directly observed” (Easton, 2010, p. 120) and this is what critical realists attempt to do, gain access to the descriptions of the reality of the participants, as they are unable to gain access to the real world or whole truth.

**Description.** The term ‘description’ is used in replacement of the term ‘experience’. The term ‘description’ was chosen due to the ontological and epistemological standpoints of critical realism and post-positivism. This term is a better fit due to these standpoints because they support the notion that the truth cannot be accessed in its entirety and that as researchers, it is a perception or description of the participant’s reality / truth that we are able to gain access to.

**Leading competitor.** The term ‘leading competitor’ is an extension from the term ‘competitive recreational athlete’. The term ‘competitive recreational athlete’ has been used to describe an individual who would “think of themselves as athletes – serious, competitive athletes. They value the health benefits of regular exercise, but they love the competitive goals and experience, even though they [may have been] competing primarily against themselves.”

(Whalen, Meyers, Donovan, 1995, p. 71). The ‘competitive recreational athlete’ is distinctive from other athletes due to the fact that

their sport involvement is what they choose to do with their free time. Although achievement and excellence in their sports might be valued; objective thinking and racing must fit into the rest of their lives... their self-identity [was] not solely dependent on their status as athletes”

(Whalen, et al., 1995, p. 71)

For this research project, the term ‘leading competitor’ was chosen as it best describes the higher performance end of the ‘competitive recreational athlete’. The term ‘leading competitor’ was also used to describe athletes who had met the New York Marathon Qualifying time while being over the age of 50.

**Masters athlete.** A term used to describe a specific athletic population in terms of age. For athletics, the age at which one is considered a ‘masters athlete’ is 35, with age category divisions at every five years (Suominen, 2011). As this age is fluid between sport disciplines, for the purpose of the current research the age of 50 and older was selected as the age population of interest due to the unique life paths that these athletes described. The cut-off age of 50 was also applied to this project due to the fact that at the age of 50, many individuals are just starting to describe physical changes that affect the psychological side of sport and their life in general. It has been supported that “age-related losses in endurance performance did not occur before the age of 50 years” (Leyk et al., 2007, p. 513) further emphasising the major changes in athletic performance that affects identities and the individual on a holistic level.

**Post-positivism.** “Post-positivist research emphasises the struggle for meaning, and the construction of new meanings and knowledges” (Ryan, n.d., p. 24). The epistemological standpoint of post-positivism supports the notion that through interviews, the researcher is

unable to access the reality of the participant due to both the participant's as well as the researcher's biases, but they are able to access the participant's perceptions of the truth (Ryan, n.d.). For post-positivism "there is no meaning without a mind" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8-9).



## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In this chapter, the first topic covered is culture and aging stereotypes in western societies, followed by an overview of what makes up a masters athlete. This overview is divided into the types of masters athletes: serious lifetime, new-to-the-sport, and the born-again masters athlete. This is followed by a temporal breakdown of the various categories of masters athletes, the first category is: the ‘youngest’ master athletes – ages 35-39, followed by the ‘young’ masters athletes – ages 40 – 50 and concludes with the masters athlete – ages 50+. The next topic discussed is the recreational and competitive participation orientation; these describe the differences between engaging in a leisurely sport and engaging in a competitive sport. An overview of societal benefits and the downsides of masters athletes is discussed next; this section is broken down into the two ends of the spectrum: masters athletes as role models and the dark end: discouraging others from participation. The next topic touched on is the positive and negative narratives of masters athletes, joining together to also include the fluid positive/negative aging narrative through sport, which describes the continuum where athletes fall. Next, the rural geographical location of Sudbury is discussed and its unique characteristics are highlighted. This is followed by a discussion of identity, broken down into sub-sections of: identity formation and identity management, athletic identity and identity foreclosure, athletic identity within the long distance running social world, ‘possible selves’ as a decision making model, and, finally, the family identity. Next, the uncharted literature gaps are highlighted, followed by the current research question.

Differentiating between cultures around the world offered unique viewpoints as well as unique values, meanings, and beliefs that are attributed to the various situations and concepts that are witnessed within any given culture (Eckersley, 2006). Within cultures, various sub-cultures

are evident and are developed in a similar fashion, by its experienced members' similar contexts as well as sharing common values, meanings, and beliefs that are specific to the sub-culture. Long distance running in Northern Ontario, specifically in Sudbury, offers an exclusive and uncommon sub-culture that is shared by the individuals who associate with the tight-knit social world of long distance running. Within sub-cultures there are certain attributes that are shared and some that are described differently between the members of the sub-culture. The longer an individual is immersed in a long distance running social world the "runners come to recognize and learn certain right ways of participating in the activity. The individual exerciser does not just run... rather through running they become part of an identifiable social group" (Hitchings & Latham, 2017, p. 338). For long distance running in the North, the runners who make up the sub-culture may come from very different athletic backgrounds which ultimately lead them to the common location where they now reside. The types of masters level long distance runners that may have made up a long distance running sub-culture usually fall into one of the following three categories. The serious life-time runner, new-to-the-sport, and the born again masters runner (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). These three categories of master level runners make for a unique collection of individuals who make up a cohort of the running sub-culture in Sudbury, Ontario. The broad term of master level athlete encompasses a wide age-range of athletes; for most sports, an athlete is considered to be at the master level at the age of thirty-five, but this is sport specific. The age range, from then on is divided into five-year categories, ensuring to encompass all of the athletes (Suominen, 2011). Sport participation is offered, described, and explored at varying levels of competitiveness. Many individuals choose to remain in the leisurely recreational activity participation for many benefits such as "enjoyment, competitive, physical fitness, social [aspect], travel, stress relief, personal challenge and skill development" (Reaburn

& Dascombe, 2008, p. 31). This is especially true due to the influence that the emerging cultural emphasis places on the benefits of remaining physically active at all ages of life (Dionigi, 2006a). On the other end of the leisure, recreational sport participation is the competitive side of sport. This is where the athletes spend much of their time competing and training at a high level to meet specific sport-related physical fitness goals. In terms of masters level athletes and the competitive side of sport, these athletes are “redefining what it means to be an older athlete” (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007, p. 359). Due to the uniqueness of masters’ level athletes, they describe their aging process through their level of sport participation. Masters level athlete’s describe one of the two aging concepts through sport, whether that is positive or negative or a combination of the two of them; which may change fluidly throughout the duration of their aging process.

The varying descriptions between the positive and negative aging narratives through sport are influenced by numerous factors depending on the situational context at the given time, such as the perception that the athletes have surrounding the idea of competitiveness in masters level sport and whether or not they believe it to be acceptable or looked down upon (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007). While navigating the aging process, these masters’ athletes who reside, train, and compete in Sudbury, Ontario work with the unique geographical terrain that Sudbury has to offer. The outdoor long distance training facilities offer a wide range of training opportunities; many places to train hills, to do speed work, and to allow for long distance scenic routes to be run and enjoyed. Referring back to the sub-culture of the long distance masters athletes, the geographical location of Sudbury plays a huge role within the dynamics. It provides many opportunities for the athletes to relate to each other based on experiences as well as for individual differences to become apparent within the sub-culture, allowing for further uniqueness. Aspects

that influence the sub-culture of the leading competitor masters level long distance runners in Sudbury coincide with three aspects that influence athletic commitment; these are, the aesthetics of the neighbourhood, the functionality and appeal of the environment, and the availability of local recreational facilities, whether they are natural or built (Humpel, 2002). Taking the physical environment into consideration provides the athletes with a unique blend of real and perceived restrictions as well as encouragement that they receive from the environment. This, once again, enhances the level of uniqueness to the sub-culture of long distance running in Sudbury, Ontario as well as to the uniqueness of the individuals and their identities. Using a tightly-knit outdoor training facility fosters a distinctive sub-culture which is even more evident when this sub-culture or parts of the sub-culture branch out and race in various locations outside of Sudbury. “Cultural influences are always easier to identify in unfamiliar societies” (Eckersley, 2001, p. 55). Cultures and sub-cultures are alike in the sense that they are made up of various people who share the same values, meanings, and beliefs; this uniqueness within each sub-culture comes from the individual identities that are seen and described as being part of a sub-culture. Sub-cultures may also be formed as a resistance or enhancement of a culture (McGannon & Schinke, 2015). These identities are unique to the sub-culture and to the individual as the “identities are performed in a social context” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 129). With the knowledge about identities being fluid, situational, multiple, and contextually negotiated by the individual (Blodgett, Ge, Schinke, & McGannon, 2017; McGannon, Schinke, Ge, & Blodgett, 2019; Ronkainen et al., 2016), identity management is important to consider as a process that each athlete and, on a broader spectrum, each individual, has to navigate as they travel through various situations and social contexts. One method of navigating various identities may be done by the concept of ‘possible selves’ termed by Markus and Nurius (1986). The concept of

‘possible selves’ allows for a method where individuals can describe and organize their identities and, from there, shape them into what they want to be and know what they want to avoid in terms of a ‘feared self’. For athletes specifically, the athletic identity makes up a large part of the individual. An athletic identity is “the level of identification [an individual has] with the athlete role” (Cosh, Crabb, & LeCouteur, 2013, p. 89). The “athletic identity cannot be understood in isolation from [sport] culture and language that promotes certain understanding of self and the sport world” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 129), meaning that it must be considered alongside the social context. To further the uniqueness of the social world and identities that are built around the sub-culture of long distance running, Shipway (2008) developed a typology by adapting Unruh’s (1979) “early exploration of social types” (Shipway, Holloway, & Jones, 2012, p. 263). This typology divides long distance runners into various categories depending on their level of commitment as well as their understanding of the long distance running social world. The first of four categories was termed the “sporting outsider”, being someone who has “no particular interest in running specifically, but actively participates in alternative sporting activities” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263) this category is the least engaged with the long distance running social world. Category two was termed the ‘occasional casual participant;’ these are the runners who run for general health and fitness and have knowledge about the basics of long distance running (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). Category three was termed the ‘regular recreational runners’ and this category is made up of the runners who participate in long distance running to further benefit others sports or use distance running as a means to achieve other activity goals (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). The fourth category was termed “experienced long distancing running insider” - they are known as individuals who are “familiar with the rules and rituals of [their] distancing running community” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). The exploration of this

typology with consideration to athletic identity, help to categorize the participants that fall into each category and from there further investigations can be done to determine how their membership in the category affects their identity or athletic identity. Finally, a three tiered classification system developed by Smith (1998) offers guidance on the “participant-group dynamics” in a sport of ‘individuals’ (p. 177). Smith (1998) acknowledged the differences, and the level of sport commitment between the three terms: ‘jogger’, ‘runner’, and ‘athlete’; and expands on how these differences play a role within the participants who make up and influence the social world of long distance running. In relation to identity, these three terms are bold identifiers of their visible commitment to their athletic identity and may heavily influence their behaviour due to the strength of this identity.

### **Culture and Aging Stereotypes in Western Societies**

Culture divides the world into different values, meanings, and beliefs; the culture is then subjected to further divisions into sub-cultures, where the values, meanings, and beliefs may be different or variations present themselves as the culture’s pre-determined ways of knowing (Eckersley, 2006). Culture furthermore “shapes every area of life, defines a world view that gives meaning to personal and collective experience, and frames the way people locate themselves within the world, perceive the world, and behave in it” (Corrin, 1995, p. 273 as cited in Eckersley, 2001, p. 55). The acknowledgment and incorporation of the values present within a culture become paramount to be understood when considering differences between and within variations of a culture due to the fact that values are a core component (Eckersley, 2006). The “values provide the framework for deciding what is important, true, right and good” (Eckersley, 2006, p. 59) for each culture. The culture or sub-culture of a society yields the power to influence emotions that are felt within and between the individuals, expectations that the

individuals in the culture have formed and their perceptions of how the culture or society should function (Eckersley, 2006). Internal consistency within any given culture is rarely, if ever, met, (Eckersley, 2001) meaning that the cultures are often faced with multiple variations derived from the people who make-up the societies and, therefore, make-up the cultures; these variations can be seen within the individuals' identities. When narrowing the scope to further investigate western cultures, Eckersley (2001) found that "western culture promotes a view of the self as individualistic, autonomous and independent of others and social influences" (Eckersley, 2001, p. 60) yet, "modern western culture is deeply incoherent" (Eckersley, 2001, p. 59).

Acknowledging the desire to be independent, while living within the western society, has greatly influenced the way in which the western population navigates the aging process and narratives that follow the individual throughout the course of life. Western society may also be defined as "a term used very broadly to refer to a heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems and specific artifacts and technologies" (ScienceDaily.com, Western culture section, para. 1). Ways of life, beliefs, and values from the history of western culture still hold true in the modernized description of culture.

Cultural sport psychology is where including culture into sport psychology is highlighted, giving culture the attention that is necessary in order to gain an inclusive understanding of sport psychology in general. "Cultural sport psychology (CSP)... challenges mainstream sport psychology's assumptions to facilitate contextualized understandings of marginalized topics and cultural identities" (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, & Fisher, 2015, p. 24). "Culturally competent and culturally sensitive practitioners [and researchers] thus do not seek to generalize across cultures or engage in stereotyping, and indeed, they strive for ways to reduce and avoid such sensitive stereotyping" (Parham, 2005 as cited in McGannon, Schinke, & Busanich, 2014, p.

136). The need for cultural sport psychology within current research was evident and the current research project was situated within CSP in the sense that the culture of the participants was considered and remained important throughout the duration of the project. Cultural sport psychology was used as a “means of encouraging [potential] diverse and marginalized views to be embraced and come forward to encourage empowerment, inclusivity, and enhanced performance in order to achieve social justice” (McGannon et al., 2014, p. 141) for the current research participants.

### **Overview of What Makes Up a Masters Athlete**

The choices in the paths that the masters athletes took in order to arrive at where they are now may have been drastically different or very similar depending on the aspect of interest or the lens used to view their lives. “Some masters runners are grizzled veterans who have been pounding out miles for decades; others are newcomers who welcome the challenge of running faster and farther” (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 125). The type of master athlete that each of these athletes was considered to be may have played an important part that may have affected or influenced their relationship with their athletic identity; visible social categorizations may have easily affected individuals’ social identity, which directly affected their personal or private identities.

**Types of masters athletes.** Pfitzinger and Latter’s (2015) book titled *Faster Road Racing*, was designed to provide guidance and tips for racing the more common road race distances (5k, 10k and the half marathon). Its focus was serious runners at the intermediate to advanced level and their running coaches. Pfitzinger and Latter (2015) developed a chapter titled *Considerations for Masters Runners* as an opportunity to define the various common types of masters runners who were training and racing at the top end of the competitive continuum



(Smith, 1998). They used three categories to define these masters' runners: serious lifetime runners, new-to-the-sport masters' runners, and the born-again masters' runners (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015).

***Serious lifetime runners.*** Masters level runners who are 'serious lifetime runners' are those individuals who started to race competitively in their childhood and have continued that pattern of serious racing throughout their middle adulthood and into their later years (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). These athletes are a well-seasoned bunch of runners who are able to describe most, if not all, of what competitive running at various levels and throughout the age categories has to offer. They may be able to describe the positive and negative sides of the sport in terms of their intense training regimen as well as the ups and downs that are inevitable when one is racing at a highly competitive level for a long duration of time. These athletes continue to push past their physical limits and endure injury as it comes, but also celebrate the good times they describe as an athlete and enjoy their accomplishments (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). A distinguishing factor that puts these athletes into this category is their extensive aerobic background that they have developed over their lifetime competing in various races and training daily; these athletes have a strong aerobic base that they are able to continuously dive into to allow themselves to perform at a high level as they age (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). Due to the amount of knowledge these runners accumulate over the years as competitive runners, they recognized the 'running hierarchy' and, even more importantly, they situate themselves in it, which stands them far apart from the typical running standards. The terms 'running hierarchy', 'competitive continuum', and 'ability continuum' are interchangeable when discussing the concept that they share (Smith, 1998, p. 186). These terms are used to describe the concept of self recognition amongst other runners, as they differ on their level of competitiveness. The

‘running hierarchy’ is a socially developed system, which adapts and conforms when many of the same participants frequently overlap. Within the ‘competitive continuum’ there were distinct categories that divided the road racers into three defined groups, these groups were termed ‘joggers’, ‘runners’, and ‘athletes; with the ‘athletes’ representing the more competitive end of the continuum (Smith, 1998, p. 189). The participants that make up these three distinct road racing groups conform and are shaped by the social behaviours, trends, and rules that help to define these groups. The identities of these runners are also influenced by which category they find themselves to be part of. This concept will be further discussed in the athletic identity section. These athletes eventually “shift their focus [away from the highly defined continuum] to age-group racing and age-graded performances” (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126) as they continue to race and produce results that are highly competitive with people their own age. Although the concept of the ‘running hierarchy’ and the ‘competitive continuum’ are still seen and acknowledged at this point in one’s athletic career (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015) these classifications still heavily influence athletes’ identity. As well as the serious-lifetime-runner, there may be serious-lifetime-athletes who already have an elite experience and aerobic base, but are new to the sport of long distance running.

*New-to –the-sport masters runners.* ‘New-to-the-sport masters’ runners are the opposite of the ‘serious lifetime runners’ in terms of when they began their running careers. “*Athletic career* is a term for a multiyear sport activity, voluntarily chosen by the person, and aimed at achieving his/her individual peak in athletic performance in one of several sport events” (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007, p. 713; emphasis in original). Many masters age competitive runners built their leading competitor status in various other sports, but found running as they aged. This group of master runners found the love of running at a later stage in their life and had

therefore not competed in many road races or had trained seriously over the span of their lives. Pfitzinger and Latter (2015) created the inclusion criteria for this group to recognize the age of 40 as a milestone for when the athlete started to adhere to a training regime. This group of athletes bring a unique aspect into the world of master level runners, due to the fact that they have already experienced some of what life had to offer without running being an aspect of their lives; each of these athletes have had a different story exclusive to them and may be “motivated to participate in masters sport for a variety of reasons” (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008, p. 31). These athletes are the individuals most likely to see the drastic health benefits as their dedication to their training increases (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). As well as seeing health benefits due to their new training regimen, these athletes will also recognize the differences between their new lifestyles of becoming “fitter and faster from week to week” (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126) as they compared themselves “to their peers who are slowing and packing on the pounds” (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126). As the athlete was experiencing the positive side effects of their newly found sport, their “love for the sport increased, [and therefore the] new-to-the-sport masters runners were able to increase their training volume” (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126). The athletes in this category often felt as if they were experiencing the fountain of youth and this was due to the fact that they were able to continuously get personal bests as their training increased. They were becoming increasingly healthier due to their devotion to the new training regimen (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). From an outside perspective, these athletes seemed to be living their best athletic career due to the delayed start. With the “lack of accumulated wear and tear on their muscles, tendons, and joints, runners in this category often enjoy a five- to eight-year window in which they continue to set lifetime personal bests” (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126). As well as the physiological benefits that the athlete would have most likely experienced,

they would also have integrated themselves into the social world of distance running which offers many psychological benefits. At this stage in an individual's life, they may be experiencing changes occurring in many different aspects; changes may be occurring in the occupational setting as well as in the home as the family obligations adapt over time. This may be a time in the athlete's life where they experience new things and have opportunities that were not there prior to this chronological age due to many things, such as time restrictions.

***Born-again masters runners.*** The athletes who compose the 'born-again masters runners' category represent a unique sub-population in the sport. These are the athletes who have a history of regular running anywhere from participating in traditional road races to performing at a highly competitive level throughout their childhood or early-adulthood. These athletes have "[possibly] begun running again for health purposes, only to find the old competitive flame still burns as their fitness increases" (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 128). In common with the 'new-to-the-sport masters runners' they may have also be motivated to re-join the social world of long distance running for a variety of reasons (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008). The 'born-again masters runners' are a diverse group of athletes because they "share many attributes with the other two groups ['the serious lifetime runners' and the 'new-to-the-sport masters runner']" (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 128). Similar to the new-to-the-sport athletes, the born-again masters runners often experience the sudden and noticeable increase in their physiological fitness as well as their overall health and, because of the increase in their athletic abilities, they are able to perform better than previously and set new personal bests (PBs) (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). In terms of the 'born-again runners' this group is able to share and acknowledge the deeper understanding that they have of the sport due to their previous dedication and time commitment. They recognize what it takes in order to be a regular or a leading competitor runner. "Individuals who

are encouraged to be active at an early age, acquire skills, obtain enjoyment from participation are more likely to” (Scanlon & Mogel & Roberto, 2004, p. 34) be active later in life or to rekindle their previous sport participation. Along with participation, skill, and enjoyment, “a positive attitude and enthusiasm for exercise across the life course has been recognized as an important motivator for maintenance of regular exercise in advanced age” (Barnett, Guell, & Ogilvie, 2013, p. 8). With the unique combination of attributes from both groups, these runners are able to experience many positive aspects of long distance running as they were re-introduced into the sport with a high comfort level that was fostered by their previous commitment to the sport. The decision for the ‘born-again’ masters athletes to originally withdraw from their sport may have been due to multiple reasons such as careers, families, or other interests (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). As the demands that are placed on their lives changed, they had to re-negotiate their time commitments to determine what adaptations must be made to better accommodate the changes occurring in their lives (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). The individuals’ identities played an important role at this point in their life due to the changing roles and obligations that they were fulfilling. “Returning to sports during this period represents a life change, suggesting these experiences were focus, liberation and self-actualisation...” (Oghene, McGannon, Schinke, Watson, & Quartiroli, 2015, p. 747). The athletes’ identity is also faced with negotiating which of their identities are going to be most visible and acknowledged at any given point throughout their life. Identities will be further discussed in a later section.

### **The ‘Youngest’ Masters Athlete – Ages 35-39**

The term ‘masters athlete’ includes a wide age-range of competitive athletes, each age division fully immersed in a specific stage of life that may be different or already / yet to be experienced by other masters level sport competitors. This level of intricacy makes masters’

level competition intriguing and highly unique in its' own way and even unique between competitors. For the development of this study, the 'youngest' masters' athlete age category has been restricted to the ages 35 years to 39 years. Although this study focused on athletes who have surpassed this phase of their life, it is important to discuss this stage as it acknowledges some of the experiences that the older masters athletes have previously navigated. This is also the age at which Athletics Canada defines a masters level athlete. Before an athlete reaches this stage of life, in their late 20s and early 30s the athlete usually begins to experience difficulties sustaining their former physical condition as a young athlete (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). On the other hand, "most serious lifetime runners [have] recorded their PRs (personal records also known as personal bests (PBs) in distances of 5k and up from the ages of 25 to 35" (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126). At this stage, depending on the sport and most certainly true for long distance runners, the athlete is very likely to be setting PBs and breaking records. In most cases, this age group has completed their full time post-secondary education and is now newly navigating a specific career path (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). Entering a new career path puts time restrictions on the individual. The individual is then more likely to experience demands on what used to be their 'free' time or their time that was not pre-occupied with career requirements, assuming this athlete is a 'serious lifetime runner'. The desire to maintain their regular athletic routine still readily felt in combination with new time restrictions, results in the athlete being faced with two demanding identities trying to co-occur (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). The 'young' masters' athlete may also be newly experiencing and fulfilling family obligations as well as encountering new identities furthering their pre-occupied role as a daughter/son or as a sister/brother to a fiancé(e) or wife/husband to a mother or a father. Navigating multiple new roles at the same time creates an intense situation that requires the individuals to consider their

personal identity and how they wish to portray themselves, engaging in the process of identity management. Due to social trends and the western way of life, career and family responsibilities often take precedence and the athletic career may be abandoned intentionally, or due to a severe lack of available time to maintain the training.

### **The ‘Young’ Masters Athletes – Ages 40-49**

For the purpose of this paper the ‘young’ master level athlete is defined as an athlete between the ages of 40-49 years. These athletes are continuing to negotiate the multiple identities that they began to form in the earlier years as well as considering the new aging identity. These individuals have been fulfilling a career role / identity and have become accustomed to their work life and responsibilities; at the end of this age bracket, the individuals may be pre-planning their retirement and to consider their retirement lifestyle and new identities. As well as maintaining their career role, at this stage in their life, they continue to deal with the shifting family responsibilities, obligations, and roles they must fulfill in order to be successful in the various avenues of their lives. Occupational and domestic roles greatly affect sport and activity participation in middle adulthood (Dionigi, Fraser-Thomas, & Logan, 2012). Using an exploratory, qualitative approach, Dionigi et al. (2012), set out to explore and understand “the role of family members in the athletes’ sport involvement, the athletes’ experiences of family support, absence of support, family conflicts, [as well as] family dynamics” (p. 366). The athlete’s family plays an important role in the athlete’s life during times of change, especially when the change is occurring in the home. The athlete may be navigating roles that have been pre-established (i.e., husband / wife roles), but the obligations that accompany those roles are often fluid and change over time as the social environment in which those roles are present is dynamic. The parental obligations change as their children grow up and therefore the parent’s

role in the child's life changes to accommodate the developments. The parent's responsibility is greatly affected as the child ages due to the fact that the parent is no longer responsible for as high a level of care as their children become more independent and self-sufficient. Opposite to this, the athletes in this age group may have the responsibility of caring for older family members (i.e., their parents). The findings from Dionigi et al. (2012)'s study on "the nature of family influences on sport participation in masters athletes" (p. 366) have suggested four themes. They are: "1) spousal (and children's) support by 'allowing'" (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 374), 'encouraging', and 'understanding' which indicate they are offering emotional and expressive support, 2) scheduling with the spouse, in terms of time obligations so that the athlete is able to fulfill the role of parenthood as well as complete their training, "3) spouses (and parent / children) training together / separately... [and] 4) the indirect influence of children" (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 378-379). The masters athlete between the ages of 40 to 50 years old may deal with any or a combination of the four themes that were suggested from the previous research. To address theme number one of spousal and their children's support, the masters athlete would be benefited by being a part of this kind of family dynamic as they foster a positive and encouraging atmosphere, where physical fitness and sport participation is not only encouraged, but also recognized as a means to maintain a healthy lifestyle throughout life. Theme two, the goal of the masters' athlete successfully scheduling with their spouse to ensure that all family, work, and athletic obligations are met, is a common goal amongst the masters' athletes in this age group. Participating in sport either together or separately, allows for an encouraging and accepting environment to develop without any hesitations or restrictions when it comes to the masters' athlete going to their sport. This concept is supported even if the focus is placed on a masters' athlete who is competing in a highly competitive sport environment, rather than leisure sport



participation. The ability to train together or the ability to train separately while remaining in a positive relationship within the family is a great benefit to everyone involved: the athlete and the family members. Finally, the fourth theme supported from this research was the indirect influence of the masters' athlete's children. This theme was directed at leisure sport participation, rather than the competitive sport participation in the sense that the theme was supported by the children and their participation in sport and how it fostered the desire for the parents to also participate. Although Dionigi et al. (2012) has supported the idea of the family being an encouraging group of people, Scanlon-Mogel and Roberto (2004) found the opposite, where the family and the family responsibilities actually negatively influenced the athlete's participation in physical activity. This was most commonly caused by the athlete's failure to schedule activities that would ensure both roles were filled to their highest potential. Along with the pressure to balance their identities and multiple obligations, at this stage in masters athletes' lives they are also experiencing physiological changes that, if not addressed and navigated properly, could create a negative connection with the sport. Masters athletes may witness a "small drop in performance through their 40s" (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015, p. 126); this is most commonly seen in the serious lifetime runners.

### **The Masters Athlete: Ages 50+**

The term 'masters athletes' was defined for the purpose of this paper as athletes who are 50 years of age or older. This age cohort of active individuals presents a unique population for research; as the current knowledge base focuses on their athletic achievements, there is a lot left to learn about this population (Baker, Horton, & Weir, 2009). This cohort presents a unique case to researchers who are interested in the older athlete and how they have navigated their life course in order to be able to successfully participate in sport or to

participate regularly in physical activity into their later years. As the age of the athlete increases, there is an escalation in the controversy and negative stereotypes that the athletes face; this is due to western society heavily valuing youthfulness over aging, regardless of how the individual accepts or adheres to an aging scheme (Baker et al., 2010; Logan, Ward, & Spitze, 1992). This age group must manage feelings of alienation and the effects of marginalization that are caused by the negative stereotypes attributed to them due to their age (relating to their place in society – someone who is on welfare or dependent on society) as well as their position in athletics trying to maintain their current leading competitor status (Baker et al., 2010). “These stereotypes unwittingly work to categorize older people as being undervalued, unproductive, and mostly dependent on society for support” (Grant & Kluge, 2007, p. 401). Along with navigating the unavoidable negative stereotypes that are painted onto the aging population as a whole, without any consideration for individual differences, the aging population is also assigned negative ‘cultural tags’ such as “‘over the hill’, ‘too old’, ‘social problem’ and ‘financial burden’” (Grant & Kluge, 2007, p. 400). The frequent and prevalent use of the ‘cultural tags’ in today’s western society leaves little room for the aging population to develop and implement positive aging narratives and identities, which would foster an optimistic and accepting outlook on the aging population as valued members of society. Closely relating to an athletic identity may be expressed differently within each individual, leading to a wide range of expressions and ways to fulfil the role/identity. Continuing with the developmental trends that have occurred throughout the two previous age division athletes, the ‘youngest’ masters’ athletes and the ‘young’ masters athletes, these athletes who qualify for the 50 years of age and older category have greater life experiences. These “older adults [have often] faced several turning points and transitions in their lives that

either impeded or enhanced their level of involvement in physical activity” (Scanlon □ Mogel & Roberto, 2004, p. 42) and therefore have had an effect on how they used their athletic identity within their life and at various points prior to the age of 50. At this stage in life, the athletes are commonly considering retirement from their occupational career or adjusting to their new life as a retiree; as well as they are experiencing new ways to fulfill their role in the family, such as empty nesters (Scanlon □ Mogel & Roberto, 2004). Retirement and experiencing fewer family obligations due to the aging of their children allow for the individual to have reduced responsibilities; these individuals are now able to reap the benefits of their newly found free time and “including a quest for better health” (Oghene et al., 2015, p. 747; Scanlon □ Mogel & Roberto, 2004). Although family obligations might be lessening as the athlete continues to age, successfully navigating the family lifestyle, including negotiations with the spouse, require “clear communication and careful scheduling” (Appleby & Dieffenbach, 2016, p. 20). It is these “quiet or dormant periods when the athletes’ placed sport in the background, with careers and family obligations seeming to take priority” (Oghene et al., 2015, p. 746). Regardless of the level of competitiveness these athletes choose to engage in, they now have the time to devote to themselves and to their physical fitness journey. The newly found free time is often seen as a ‘born-again’ opportunity for the competitive athlete who wishes to either continue their highly competitive sport career or rekindle it as life slowed down (Oghene et al., 2015; Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015; Scanlon □ Mogel & Roberto, 2004). For the leading competitors, the increase of free time allows for the increase in adherence to their strict training regimens; this is where the athletes are able to gain the most benefits to their performance (Grant & Kluge, 2007). Like many athletes, the leading competitors in long distance running over the age of 50 deal with

social and physical motivational factors, as well as other factors that motivated them to participate for a variety of reasons (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008). A combination of the strength of the connection the athletes have with their long distance runner athletic identity and their motivation to participate and adhere to such a strict training and living regimen is able to express a lot about the athletes and how they navigate through life in this society. These athletes in particular, due to their age, deal with the negative stereotypes that are put on them from western society on a daily basis; there are even more restrictive stereotypes when considering the leading competitor masters age athlete.

An apparent negative stereotype that the aging population in western society must navigate is the idea that, society as a whole believes the aging population should not be competing in sports at a high level and an even more restricting stereotype is that the aging population is a burden to society. They are seen as people who need assistance and who are not able to give back, but instead just take away from society (Baker et al., 2010). In the age cohort, a leading competitor may also be subjected to more of the negative stereotype due to their participation in intense sport because they are going against what society believes the aging population should be doing, and this high level of sport participation is seen by some as inappropriate. Depending on the strength of the individual's athletic identity and how they have formed this identity for themselves plays a role in their overall identities and how they choose to live their lives, being involved in sport.

### **Recreational Participation Orientation**

Due to western society's healthy living initiative, physical activity and healthier ways of life are prescribed and suggested to people of all ages. The understanding "of aging and physical leisure [participation] in the West are continually changing at both the individual and social

levels” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 181). The aging population has been increasing their level of physical activity for multiple reasons. One leading reason is that “for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, images and understanding of aging and older people were primarily associated with ill health, frailty, loss, disability, disengagement, and dependency on the health care system” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 181). Along with the aging population being bombarded with these negative characteristics and stereotypes, “for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rest or gentle exercise for therapeutic reasons was the expected norm for older people” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 182). Within society, there was not only a push for the aging population to become more active so that they are able to be independent and self-sufficient later in life, but there was also the desire to alter the negative stereotypes that are placed upon them and this change needs to start at the individual and spread outwards from there. “Older people involved in regular exercise and sport have shown that [they] participate [for reasons such as], enjoyment, competitiveness, physical fitness, health benefits, social [aspect], travel, stress relief, personal challenge and skill development” (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008, p. 31). Supporting the movement of the aging population towards a regular fitness or physical activity regime is today’s dominant idea. This idea is that older people should take preventive measures to remain physically active, healthy, and living independently for as long as possible. From there, this cohort of the aging population is divided into two very distinct groups. There are the individuals who participate in sport solely for leisure, social, and health benefits, who have little desire to be competitive. There are also the individuals who strive to be in the best physical shape, who aspire to break records and to compete at a leading competitor level through their aging process. The recognition of the recreational participation orientation and the competitive participation orientation has tailored to the needs of both types of athletes. In

terms of the culture of recreational long distance running, the desire to reach and maintain a level of health and fitness is at the forefront of focus (Shipway & Holloway, 2016).

### **Competitive Participation Orientation**

Masters athletes who fall under the ‘competitive participation orientation’ are “redefining what it means to be an older athlete” (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007,p. 359) in almost every aspect. These athletes often have to deal with a large amount of negativity towards their competitive participation brought on by society, due to the norms that are most commonly understood about what it means to be an aging individual. These athletes are marginalized in more than one area of life: first, they are seen in a negative light due to the value that society has put on youth and the negative ideas they have put on the aging process; as well as they are further marginalized when their aging journey and their participation in highly competitive sport are considered in combination (Logan et al., 1992). Masters athletes provide a performance profile that is unique to the “self-selected groups of people dedicated to exercise [and] this dedication makes them atypical” (Lazarus & Harridge, 2007, p. 462). Society’s preconceived ideas on aging and competitive sport have caused a divide in the ways masters athletes express themselves and potentially how they continue to identify themselves with their athletic identity, when talking about their sport. The first way of expression is negative, in the sense that the athlete is highly competitive and devotes much time to their sport, but when asked about it they are worried to say that they are competitive athletes due to the way society would view it. These athletes “justify their competitiveness by claiming that their actions were not overly aggressive, violent, or about winning at all costs” (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007, p. 376). This is known as a distress in the athlete’s life, as the identity that they are choosing to associate with goes against what society is

expecting from that individual, but that identity is also potentially most prevalent for the individual. These athletes represent the portion of the competitive aging population that has the strong desire to fit into the societal norms and adhere to the western way so they purposely play down their competitiveness to better line up with the age appropriate non-competitive leisure activity participation (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007). Dionigi and O’Flynn (2007) found some of their participants “expressed embarrassment and guilt about being competitive in later life, but it did not stop them from competing or trying their hardest” (p. 370). Although societal norms would suggest that a high degree of competitiveness in masters level athletes is unappealing, the desire for some masters level athletes to remain competitive is strong and something that they are not willing to part with or associate less with, solely due to the current societal norms. This way of expressing their competitive participation leads us to the next way, where the masters’ athletes are highly competitive but, in this case, they spend more time discussing aspects of competitiveness rather than trying to justify it and adhere to the societal norms. These masters’ athletes display a high degree of straight forwardness when discussing their level of competitiveness. These “participants talked about: enjoying winning and breaking records; appreciating the medals, recognitions, and status that accompany competition; and constantly monitoring their performance levels in comparison to their own previous standards and/or others of a similar or a significantly younger age” (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007, p. 368). These are the masters’ athletes who are the most unique in the sense that they are heavily going against societal and cultural norms and re-defining what it means to be an aging individual and, even more so, an aging athlete. These masters’ level athletes may face the most adversity in order to remain competitive due to their open nature and strong athletic identity.

## **An Overview of Societal Benefits and Downsides of Masters Athletes**

The aging population is often separated into two opposing categories: on one end of the spectrum there are the individuals who choose a more sedentary lifestyle and on the other end there are the active individuals who often engage in physical activities and maintain physical fitness regimens; this category includes the leading competitors at the top end. Both of these stereotypical classifications present their own characteristics and norms for their respective cohort. For the purpose of this study, I have not been focusing on the sedentary aging individuals, but I have been investigating the active aging individuals and how they further divide. After acknowledging the two opposing stereotypical aging individual's lifestyles of either participating in a sedentary lifestyle or an active lifestyle, there are two more important distinctions that are formed using a lens adapted to the social world of long distance running that is constantly enforced by their norms. Masters athletes can be appreciated and accepted as role models to not only the aging population, but also society as a whole or they are not accepted and seen as a discouraging factor to other aging individuals. (Baker et al., 2010). The concepts of masters' athletes being both role models in society as well as discouraging others from participation due to an intimidation factor are contradictory; these concepts are built around individuals' understandings of what it means to grow old, but may hold the power to affect individuals' identity – specifically an athletic identity. These perceptions are often influenced by a person's own health status as well as their personal beliefs surrounding the physical fitness and (competitive) sport participation within the aging population.

**Masters athletes as role models.** Masters athletes can be viewed as important role models to today's society, where reaching and maintaining a high level of health and wellness throughout the duration of one's life is one of the current main focuses for development. Recognizing that



the sport of distance running is unique in the individuals it attracts and combining that with the specificity of masters' athletes, there is an unmatched cohort of dedicated, active individuals who fulfil the role of leading competitors. With the high number of masters' athletes who regularly participate and perform in distance running, they have created and are continuously supporting, molding, and navigating their sub-culture of long distance running; which further supports and develops the athletic identity. In 2010, Baker et al. concluded that masters athletes had reported they perceived themselves as people who have 'social worth' due to their consistent efforts to preserve good health, as well as "reduce health care costs, [and were] capable of success in competition [and were therefore] deserving of public recognition" (Baker et al., 2010, p. 7). This cohort has the power to be a role model in many aspects of life, such as their achievements, health and wellness, and their attitudes. These masters athletes "who stay active above and beyond recommended levels may perform an important social role, as they can alter societal expectations of what it means to grow old" (Baker et al., 2010, p. 4); this would allow the active aging population to be more widely accepted as they would be seen as role models. "Levy and Banaji noted the potential of these 'exemplars' [the elite masters level runners] to influence societal attitudes towards the elderly" (Baker et al., 2010, p. 8) which increases the influential power of the leading competitor masters sport participation population.

The results from Baker et al.'s (2010) study supported three distinct themes describing how the aging population reacted to the leading competitor masters athletes. The first two themes were: (1) the aging population found the leading competitor masters runners to be inspirational, and (2) the aging populations thought that they may be inspirational, but only to individuals who already are moderately active (Baker et al., 2010). When masters' level leading competitors are considered an inspiration to the aging cohort, positive changes will come from their competitive

participation that affect more people than just themselves; the aging population would be motivated to also participate in sport, in some capacity. Elite level masters runner Ed Whitlock was a prime example of what it is like to be a masters level runner who perceives himself as “a role model for both younger and older athletes” (Roper, Molnar, & Wrisberg, 2003, p. 385). Taking pride in their ability to be a role model for others fosters a more positive relationship between the athletes and their sport. The second finding, the idea that the aging population thought the leading competitor masters runners may be inspirational, but only to those who are already moderately active, also supports the positive influence of increased physical activity participation by increasing the level of competition in moderately active participants. The third main finding is the most negative finding, where the aging population found the leading competitor masters level runners to be “distinctly unappealing” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 8) in the sense that the masters athlete is viewed as an “aberration”, something that is unwelcome.

**The dark end: Discouraging others from participation.** The concept of the ‘competitive continuum’ can also be applied to the varying levels of competitiveness that constitute the different levels of masters athlete participation (Smith, 1998). Continued from the trend that has been described in the earlier section about Baker et al.’s (2010), study, the final finding was that some of the aging population reacted negatively to the leading competitor masters level runners describing them as “distinctly unappealing” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 8). These aging individuals were influenced negatively when considering participating in a physical fitness regimen because they believed that they would not be able to reach the same level as their competitive runner counterparts so; they were discouraged to even try. They had intense feelings of intimidation caused by their perception of what it means to be a leading competitor masters’ runner. This causes a problem for society in the sense that with these negative reactions surrounding the

competitive aging cohort, there is less motivation and influences that support a positive fitness regimen or sport participation in the aging cohort as a whole.

### **The Positive and Negative Narratives of Masters Athletes**

The aging process is inevitable, commonly distinguished by various life milestones, yet highly individualistic to each person navigating through it. The uniqueness of their description of the aging process is depicted by the culture, the society, and the generation in which they have been raised. The aging narratives and cultural/societal norms have raised the individual with a set of beliefs and values; they also influence the beliefs and perceptions they form surrounding the aging process, aging individuals, and the identities they withhold or rework within the process. The aging process has no set length, no defined starting chronological age or physical status at which one would expect a decline; it is highly individualized and altered based on the previous life descriptions offered by the individuals on how they have chosen to live their life (Stowe & Cooney, 2015) as well as any and all identities that they have used to describe themselves. The aging narrative is complex in the sense that it is built incorporating the two concepts of a positive or a negative aging narrative. Specific to this research, the aging narrative in its entirety was considered within sport participation and highly committed competitive sport dedication realm (Baker et al., 2010; Dionigi, 2006a, 2006b; Lepers & Cattagni, 2012). The entirety of the aging narrative on an individualistic level may have been influenced by western societies' "desire to retain youthfulness, health, and fitness at all ages" (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 183); it is this desire that can be interpreted and accepted by the individual and, from there, it can be explored fluidly as either more expressive of the negative or of the positive aging narrative, possibly having an effect on an athletic identity the individual may hold. Athletes describe the aging narrative within

the fluidity of the more positive aging narrative and the more negative aging narrative; these descriptions may motivate the athlete either for positive or negative reasons to continue their participation in sport at any level. “Sport can help [the aging population] fight/ resist, monitor, adapt to, avoid, and/or accept the aging process” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 7). Navigating the competitive sport world in combination with the aging process as well as the cultural ideas surrounding both topics creates an intense path for the leading competitor masters level sport participant to maneuver. The group of masters level leading competitor sport participants strive to remain true to themselves and their ideal identities for the duration of their lives, while striving to live in a positive manner. Although in past research, the aging narratives have been described in two defined positive and negative narratives, a more inclusive story describing the athletes aging narrative that inevitably includes both the positives and negatives is more appropriate to describe the story of the athletes’ lives.

**Positive aging narratives through sport.** Within the greater concept of the aging narrative, the knowledge gained by the exploration of the positive aging literature has been used by governments and businesses to justify the health and fitness promotion movement (Dionigi, 2006a), further supporting the positive aging narrative through sport, while allowing for the continuation of a strong athletic identity. Sport is recognized as a method in which one would successfully navigate the positive aspects of the aging process, as sport encourages athletes to stay in touch with their physical body and acknowledge their physical limitations as they may change over time. When masters level leading competitors describe the positive aspects of the aging narrative through their continued high level of sport participation, they have the ability to allow sport to encourage and guide them through the aging process with minimal drawbacks or fewer negative effects at the time. These are the leading competitor sport participants who

continue to participate in sport to help them experience more of the positive aspects of the aging narrative by allowing sport to mark milestones in one's life; these milestones are often physical limitations that come along with aging, but they may also be described as positive markers to identify the various stages of life (Baker et al., 2010) and, therefore, various stages of the aging process. This cohort is assisted by the changes that are occurring in society surrounding the aging process as the understandings of aging and physical leisure in the west are continually changing at both the individual and social levels (Dionigi, 2006b). Leading competitor masters level athletes are able to influence society and, over time, change societal norms and the way that society views the aging population as well as what is expected and accepted from them in that "masters athletes raise both physical and psychological ceilings and shatter the barriers of expectations that society has for the elderly" (Suominen, 2011, p. 41).

A positive aging discourse supports the positive aspects of the greater aging narrative as it refers "collectively to research, theories, images, or attitudes about celebrating later life as a period for enjoyment, good health, independence, vitality, exploration, challenge, productivity, creativity, growth, and development rather than solely focused upon decline, disengagement, and hopelessness" (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 182). Understanding the positive aspects of the aging narrative in relation to sport, more specifically the sport of long distance running; the athletes are able to use their sport participation to assist in experiencing and expressing a smooth navigational path through the aging process. Along with the athletes remaining connected to their physical body, its abilities, and health status throughout the sport of long distance running, the athlete is potentially able to maintain a high level of mental health. "Distance running was initially presented as an aid to achieving and maintaining physical health, but it was quickly upgraded as

a means of improving mental health as well” (Leedy, 2009 as cited in Popov, Sokic, & Stupar, 2019, p. 3)

**Negative aging narratives through sport.** Within the greater concept of the aging narrative, opposing the positive aspects, there are negative aspects that may be experienced. There are leading competitor masters level athletes who may remain highly competitive, but they express negative aspects of the aging narrative through their strict sport participation and training regimen. The description of the negative aspects of the aging process may have an effect on the individuals’ identity, specifically an athletic identity, when considering the athlete population. For some long distance runners the “maintenance of intense physical activity [such as their training programs] may indicate a denial of existential issues (self-reflection on meaning of life, bodily limitations, ill health and death) which could pose challenges to identity management” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 8). An athlete may be maintaining a highly competitive sport status through strict sport participation to “avoid ill health and isolation” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 8) that is often seen within the aging western society. These are the athletes who are actively fighting “the dominant medicalized view of aging [that] is embedded in western society” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 182). By default, western society indirectly fosters the more negative aspects of an aging process, by the ideas and expectations they have surrounding the aging population. The “images and understandings of aging and older people primarily associated with ill health, frailty, loss, disability, disengagement, and dependency on the health care system” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 181). When aging athletes stretch themselves in terms of physical limitations to avoid physical deterioration, they may tightly hold on to their athletic identity as it develops and becomes even more important to them, due to the fact that identity shifting is often a time of uneasiness for the individual. The individual may miss “some elements of their involvement in

sport and express feelings of loss of control, disorientation, and frustration” (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000, p. 122) that come along with the increasing physical limitations brought on by age. Athletes who describe the negative aspects of the aging narrative through sport are still trying to avoid the negative stereotypes that are produced by society and plagued onto the aging population without any consideration for individual differences or any thought into the protection of the aging athlete population. The descriptions of the negative aspects of the aging narrative may be initiated due to various individual factors that may either be deeply rooted from childhood experiences or caused by events that occur later in life and scare the individual into a frantic state of actively avoiding ill health that is inevitable with aging. These athletes may also be intensely trying to avoid the “negative assumptions... associated with older age, such as decline in health causing a burden on the health and social... systems, loss of productivity resulting in a decreased workforce, and loss of independence leading to a dependency on long-term health care” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 182). As well as fighting the negative ideas that society has placed around the aging population, this population is forced to potentially alter their identity even more, especially if they are maintaining a strong athletic identity, due to the importance high level sport participation has in their lives. The negative aspects of the aging process are most likely to foster a strong athletic identity that may in fact be detrimental to the individual who possesses that identity due to the diehard nature of the competitive sport commitment. This identity formation process would leave the individual experiencing a great deal of pressure to perform at a highly competitive level, forcing them to overlook possible setbacks or obstacles such as injury, which supports the idea that “injury related retirements [if the injury is deemed career-ending] are more problematic for individuals with strong athletic identities” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 356).

**Fluid positive / negative aging narratives through sport.** The entirety of the aging narrative is highly individualistic due to the various life experiences, beliefs, and values an individual developed and lived by throughout their life. Individuals describe both positive and negative aspects as they live out their own individualistic aging narrative. The two aspects of the aging narrative come to form a complex and highly individualistic narrative when the athletes are experiencing both the positive and negative aspects (Baker et al., 2010; Dionigi, 2006a, 2006b; Lepers & Cattagni, 2012). This inclusive aging narrative is fluid between the characteristics and traits that are described at both ends of the spectrum, meaning that the individual ages through their sport participation, but the motivational factors of that participation may be felt as negative or positive depending on the situational context at that time.

Athletes could best be described as the aging population who turns a blind eye to the possibilities of aging (Baker et al., 2010). This is the best way to describe these athletes because they are describing moments of participation that are due to the fear of the aging body slowing down, but they also describe the positive aspects of the aging narrative and recognize their ability to use sport participation to celebrate good health, exploration, challenge, and productivity (Dionigi, 2006b). Athletes may be seen “straining to maintain their participation.... in this sense athletes were expressing a strong desire to continue their participation before their abilities gradually faded away” (Oghene et al., 2015, p. 749). Western society and their preconceived ideas surrounding the aging process and the aging population may affect the individual’s aging narrative, as society has developed and accepted various norms over other methods of aging. “Today a dominant idea is that older people should take preventive measures to remain physically active, healthy, and living independently for as long as possible” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 182) as this is true for the western’s population as a whole, the leading competitor masters



athletes also describe the desire to “remain physically active, [and] healthy” (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 182) as well as maintain their high level of physical performance. Dionigi (2006b), understood this trend as “an emerging cultural emphasis on physical activity, leisure, and sport as strategies for maintaining the physical, social, and psychological health for older people, resisting the aging body, postponing deep old age” (p. 182).

With emphasis on a highly competitive level of sport participation and the potential desire to resist the aging body and postpone deep old age, the negative aspects of the aging narrative may be experienced; although these individuals would not be experiencing or exploring the negative aspects of the aging narrative throughout the duration of the sport participation. This literature implies that older people who compete in sport are automatically seen to be resisting the dominant negative stereotypes associated with aging and feel empowered to live a fulfilled and healthy life. Alternatively, one could argue that older athletes are taking up the positive aging discourse and have the potential to express undesirability or denial of the inevitability of old age in their attempt to resist the aging body. However, the phenomenon of older people competing in sport may be more complex than either resistance, feelings of personal empowerment, or an expression of the undesirability of deep old age. This participation may instead represent a simultaneous interaction and negotiation of all these dimensions (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 184). It is the combination of these dimensions that make-up the aging narrative that athletes describe.

### **Rural Sudbury (Climate, Geographical Location)**

With the world’s attention drawn to the level of physical activity and sport participation, investigating the factors that influence sport participation is of interest to policy makers and program developers (Humpel, 2002). Investigated influences that have shown to affect the level

of sport participation have been classified into seven domains: demographic and biological, psychological, cognitive and emotional, behavioural attributes and skills, social and cultural, physical environmental, and physical activity characteristics (perceived effort and intensity) (Humpel, 2002). Often it is believed that there are more opportunities for those who live within a well developed urban part of the world, and more specifically a more opportunistic urban part of Ontario. Opportunities are still available to those who live in the more rural parts of Ontario, but their navigational paths to obtain and utilize the same resources as the individuals who live in the urban sections may differ greatly. Investigating environmental factors that influence the individual prove to hold some consistency and continuity between individuals, but there is also room for specific differences that vary between “different activities, different individuals, and different circumstances” (Bandura, 1986 as cited in Humpel, 2002, p. 188).

In terms of urban and rural differences while considering sport, the makeup of the developmental areas differs in terms of the available training facilities as well as the other support resources such as coaching, training, and rehabilitation staff. Considering physical activity and sport participation for the cohort of individuals who are 50 years and older, investigating the differences between those individuals who live in a rural versus an urban area is important to gain a better understanding of the identities these individuals use to foster their leading competitor sport. “Physical activity [and therefore sport participation] can be promoted or encouraged within some environments, while made more difficult or restricted in others” (Humpel, 2002, p. 189). This idea can be generalized to cover the differences between the rural and the urban areas in which athletes live and develop. Sudbury, Ontario offers all runners, recreational to the leading competitor, a variety of outdoor multi-sport trails. The Lake Laurentian Conservation area offers a wide range of trails and sections of trails that are

physically challenging and some that are leisurely and provide clean footing. The more difficult sections of trail allow for an athlete to be faced with a challenge that requires a high degree of technical skills; in terms of running this would include sections such as steep inclines and declines, rough footing where rocks are jagged, and narrow turns requiring precise and well executed strides. The more leisurely sections of the trails offer a wide, well maintained trail where athletes are able to run easily with a group of people, be confident in their strides, and increase speed as the trail allows. The Lake Laurentian Conservation area also offers trails of varying distances; some are short and would not require a lot of time to complete, whereas, some of the others offer a runner a longer trail to train and develop themselves as an athlete

(Tripadvisor).

Sudbury Ontario is home to the Sudbury Masters Running club, which is a well known club that offers group runs and training for individuals of various abilities with various goals for running. The Sudbury Masters Running club utilizes these trails as their primary outdoor running facility. Their runs are based out of the Laurentian University's Athletic Building, where they have easy access to the surrounding roads, the Lake Laurentian Conservation area trails, and sections of the Trans Canada Trail. During the summer months the club utilizes the 400m outdoor track which is located near a trail entrance and during the winter months they move their intervals and tempo style work to the 200m indoor track, in order to allow for this style of workout to continue to be executed all year round ([www.sudburyrocks.ca](http://www.sudburyrocks.ca)). This set up allows the committed runners to train all year and to participate and develop through a variety of different training schedules for all acknowledged running distances.

Sudbury, Ontario's long distance experience is also unique due to the fact that Sudbury is home of one of three nationwide cold weather half marathons. Sudbury is home of the

Hypothermic Half, a tough long distance winter time half marathon race that is designed for the runners who want to be challenged by the winter elements and brave the cold. Due to the popularity of this race, the cold weather does not prove to be a deterrent for the local runners.

## **Identity**

The concept of identity has been studied at length in relation to various aspects of life, yet it is still a widely researched area in the academic world. Many researchers have defined identity using various criteria. A common theme in defining identity has been that it is a “personal theory of self” (Kleiber, 1999, p. 94). This simple definition has since been expanded on to be considered as “Identity is conceptualized as a self-theory, a conceptual structure of self-representation and self-regulatory constructs.” (Berzonsky, 2004, p. 303). Identity is also known to be “something which is shifting not fixed, chosen not given, and multiple not singular” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 6) and further defined “as a multidimensional view of oneself that is both enduring and dynamic” (Lally, 2007, p. 86). Visible shifts in identities are seen when the individual becomes closer or further away from differing identities through their life span or throughout their day-to-day life as they fulfill different roles (Ronkainen et al., 2016).

The complex concept of identity is broken down into two main types of identity: personal identity and social identity. Although there are differences between a personal and a social identity, they are “inextricably linked” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 6), meaning that they are incapable of being disentangled and must be considered together. Social identities are heavily influenced by the population that is surrounding the individual at any given moment. This allows for the individual to pick, choose, and adapt any identity to better allow themselves to seamlessly fit into the population that they are surrounded by, increasing their level of social desirability (Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000). Through life, people develop and form various identities

leading them to the point where they “have a wealth of social identities [that] they can focus on” (Mussweiler et al., 2000, p. 400). This is an example of how identities are multiple and fluid (McGannon, McMahon, & Gonsalves, 2018, 2018; McGannon, McMahon, & Price, 2018).

The fluidity and adaptability of social identities is important to individuals’ self-worth and self-esteem, as they may use their ability to adapt their social identity as a method of self-protection or self-preservation; avoiding any alienation that may be experienced due to individuality within a certain social group. For example, an athlete who is currently in an athletic social setting, such as at a scheduled practice or on a run, may identify more closely with their role as an athlete and when they are no longer in the social setting, they may slightly or drastically distance themselves from that identity and fulfil another role more closely. The various “identities are produced, shaped, taken-up or resisted” (Cosh et al., 2013, p. 90) by the individual. The masters athlete’s athletic identity may be supported by the social setting of a scheduled practice or a run with teammates and therefore at this time this specific identity is being reinforced, further produced, and taken-up more closely by the individual. On the other hand, when the athlete is not in the social contexts of running, the athletic identity may be resisted by the athlete depending on their perceptions that they have about what others may think / feel about masters’ level athletes who are highly engaged in and committed to the sport. If the athlete has perceived others as having a negative attitude towards masters’ level athletes, the athlete may then resist their athletic identity and take-up another identity at that time to avoid negativity.

Identities are “something that people do or perform, rather than have (Butler, 1990; Willig, 2008)” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 133), which suggests that identities are multiple and that they may often conflict (McGannon, McMahon, & Price, 2018; Ronkainen et al., 2016).

Identifying with and fulfilling the social cues of a specific identity must be considered alongside the “acknowledge[ment] that identities are performed in a social context” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 129), describing the relationship between the individual and the social context they are in, due to the parallel that is seen between the two. With identities formed in relation to social constructs, contexts, and settings surrounding the individual, it must be understood that they “cannot be assessed in isolation from the cultural context” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 129). This concept is supported by the notion that identities form identity meanings and these meanings are unique, yet fluid and are important to the individual, in terms of how their identity is playing a part in their life (McGannon, et al., 2018). Social settings offer a specific location or context where the individual may choose to closely identify with one of their many identities to better assimilate to the group’s socially acceptable and desirable behaviours. The reciprocal relationship and constant negotiations between the identities of an individual and the social context are what foster the development of social norms and acceptable behaviours, forcing individuals to adapt to various constructs in which they are a part. Managing identities is important to the athlete’s life. Ensuring the individuals portray themselves the way they wish, enables them to fit into society and social contexts to their chosen degree. “Identity management is the process in which older adults negotiate and construct a personal and social sense of self” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 5). Successfully managing one’s identities allows them to move fluidly between social contexts. An example of a way to organize numerous identities is through a hierarchy system, where “the organization attributed to [the] self often pertains to the way in which discrete identities relate to one another” (Stryker & Serpe, 1994, p. 17). Identity management is a critical part of the human life because the salient identity is always changing as the individual moves between various social constructs throughout their day or their life.

**Identity formation and identity management.** Identity formation and identity management are terms used to describe the process of an individual navigating multiple personal and social identities and, further, using their experiences to construct an identity that is important and relevant to them as an individual. Identity formation is a dynamic process “requiring opportunities for self-expression and social feedback and ample room for revisions” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 195). The identity formation process is a grand process of trial and error; each individual must navigate the process on their own time committing to and abandoning identities along the way. “Opportunities for failure as well as success, provide direct experience in the management of emotions” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 195) and this is acknowledged as a critical part in the identity formation process as it offers experiences needed to guide the individual into creating and developing their own personal sense of identity, unique to what is important to them. The identity formation process “requires commitment, however and only those forms of play that capture one’s serious attention are likely to transform the self in any meaningful way.” (Klieber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 196).

The various identities that are formed by individuals are highly dependent on their personal values and beliefs, what is important, to what degree, and why. A commitment to sport or to an athletic identity is an example of a form of play in which the individuals would be able to transform themselves in a purposeful way. Sport is a great avenue one can use to develop an identity, due to the fact that it is an “experience that is expressive, challenging, and socially integrating” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 196). “It is perhaps inevitable... that through [the] dedication and physical efforts [of training for long distance running], marathon runners may develop a strong identification with this type of activity” (Robinson, Patterson, & Axelsen, 2014, p. 376). Once identities are developed by the individual and they have committed to the process

of identity formation long enough to embody the identity and use it as a representation of themselves, they are then required to manage the variety of identities that they have formed in a way that allows them to excel in terms of their life commitments (careers, family obligations, happiness). Identity management occurs throughout one's lifespan, but is often prevalent in the lives of the aging population. Identity management later in life may be defined as "the process in which older adults negotiate and construct a personal and social sense of self." (Dionigi, 2002, p. 5). Later life "is a significant time for personal change and development" (Dionigi, 2002, p. 5) and leisure activity or physical activity for this population is valuable in the sense that it may help them better manage their identities. The reciprocating relationship between the 'sport world' and the individual is an example of an individual negotiating identity with social/cultural norms and constructs of the athletic setting. Within the athletic identity, the athlete is faced with multiple layers of identity which they must negotiate to determine where they fit into the athletic community. Constant identity negotiations must be made and altered as the social constructs of the group change; this is an example of the identity management process (Dionigi, 2002).

**Athletic identity and identity foreclosure.** Athletic identity is defined by Cosh et al. 2013 as "the level of identification [an individual has] with the athlete role" (p.89). An athletic identity is one of many identities that an individual will choose for themselves as a personal, or social identity or a combination of the two; moving "beyond the static role-based conception" (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 135). First, the athlete role is fulfilled by the individual and from there, if sport participation is of value to them; they are able to form an athletic identity. The athletic identity is formed to the degree which is dependent on how important sport participation is to them. An athlete role fosters an athletic identity and is defined as a role that "individuals can strongly and exclusively identify themselves" (Brewer, 1993, p. 345) with. The athletic identity



is “undoubtedly a central source of self-worth for many individuals” (Brewer, 1993, p. 345) and can be defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with an athlete role” (Sparkes, 1998, p. 645). Specifically, to an athletic identity, if the individuals rate athletics as a highly important part of their life, the more closely they relate to the role of an athlete will create identity salience (Horton & Mack, 2000). An athletic identity is known to hold “a unique status among other situated identities” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 339). This claim is supported by two underlying assumptions, the first one being that an “athletic identity is typically formed early in one’s life” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 339). With an athletic identity usually being formed in the early stages of one’s life, it allows for sport participation to have a large impact on an individual in terms of how the sport participation facilitates character building. Along with building character, sport allows the individual to build competence in what they are doing, in this case, sports and “competence would appear to be necessary for a person to take pride in and identify with the ability to struggle and persist” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 201) further enhancing an athletic identity. Second, there is a “unique public nature of an athletic identity” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 340). The role of an athlete has a high degree of visibility that is unique to the athlete role and unlike other role enactments; this further enhances the social athletic identity (Webb et al., 1998).

Due to the complexity and visibility of an athletic identity, it has been further broken down into private and public athletic identities; these are specific to the athlete, but are similar to the other personal and social identities an individual may be fulfilling. “A private athletic identity refers to one’s internal thoughts, feelings and assessment of oneself as an athlete [and a public athletic identity is used to describe] one’s public reputation in the social role of an athlete” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 358). A public athletic identity and the social nature of the athletic identity

have an interchanging relationship where they influence and further enhance each other. The social role of an athlete is important both on the personal and the social level, but those might also be interchangeable as they heavily influence each other. “The social nature of [an] athletic identity is revealed in the assertion that individuals may be making a social statement about themselves simply by choosing to participate in a particular sport or exercise activity” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 239). The “athletic identity cannot be understood in isolation from [sport] culture and language that promotes certain understandings of self and the sport world” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 129). The reciprocating relationship between what is termed the ‘sport world’ and the individual is an example of an individual negotiating identity with social/cultural norms and constructs of the athletic setting.

Within the athletic identity, the athletes are faced with multiple layers of identity which they must negotiate to determine where they best fit. Constant identity negotiations must be made as the social constructs of the group change; this is an example of the identity management process (Dionigi, 2002). An athletic identity is not only complex due to the multiple levels of the identity, but it is also complex because the degree to which an individual will associate with an athletic identity can vary greatly from person to person, and even within a single person, based on reasons such as life or athletic events and perceptions. A strong athletic identity is often described by leading competitor and elite level athletes, as these are the athletes who are devoting much of their time and who are highly committed to the sport and all that it entails; the social aspect, the training, and the mindset. A strong athletic identity is often described by highly committed athletes because they have “invested thousands of hours of cultivation in order to take [their] sporting performance into the realm of primary immediacy” (Sparkes, 1998, p. 655). A strong athletic identity also has two sides to it; for some athletes it may be experienced in a very

positive manner where the athlete experiences minimal friction and complications within their sport; or it may be experienced in a negative way that has the potential to lead the athlete down a path where they may be met with injury and the development of unhealthy habits relating to their sport and performance.

The most noticeable potential benefit of athletes committing themselves to the athlete role is “the development of a salient self-identity or sense of self” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 239). Regular sport participation inherently fosters a strong athletic identity as “sport participation provides opportunities for individuals to develop athletic skills, engage in social interaction, measure their abilities, and build confidence” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 239). A developed and sustained strong athletic identity also has the benefits of an overall powerful sense of self-identity, which fosters a sense of purpose, greater performance, and preeminent achievements, as well as, an increased likelihood of maintaining a higher commitment to physical activity or sport participation later in life (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006).

With many benefits that may be experienced by engaging in sport, it is not uncommon for athletes to highly commit to the sport and to their role as an athlete. As this commitment becomes greater, athletes may need to “narrow their external activities in order to achieve optimal athletic performance” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 239) further enhancing their identity as an athlete, and fulfilling the athlete role’s requirements to a higher degree. With a high level of commitment to a strong athletic identity, there are many health and fitness benefits that are tapped into due to the athlete’s desire to perform well, and live a long, healthy, injury free life. The athletic identity is unique in the way that a strong athletic identity may not always be beneficial to the athlete. A high commitment to the sport and to the outcome of a competition may lead the athlete down a negative path with more negative experiences than positive ones. A

strong and exclusive athletic identity may act as an Achilles Heel or a Hercules Muscle to individual athletes. “Most of the proposed costs of a strong athletic identity pertain to difficulties an athlete may encounter in sport career transitions” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 240).

Examples of sport career transitions may be caused by the termination of the athlete participating in the sport, the setback of an injury that would withhold the athlete from participating, temporarily or permanently, or the act of being cut from a team due to reasons that may be out of the athlete’s control. For an athlete who has a strong and therefore most likely exclusive, athletic identity, not being able to participate in their sport may cause the athlete emotional difficulties or disturbances because it is this athletic identity that is most salient in their lives; the identity from which they receive the most self-worth. There is a balance that must be navigated by the athlete to ensure that they are committing to the athletic identity in a beneficial and healthy way. The athletic identity is a tricky one to navigate due to the fact that a strong athletic commitment is necessary to excel as an athlete, but if it is too strong, the athlete may start to suffer from negative emotional disturbances and develop unhealthy (athletic) habits. Individuals who prematurely commit themselves to the athlete role or commit to a high degree, may not carry out an exploration of other career, education, and lifestyle options, simply due to their sport involvement (Brewer et al., 1993).

Along with the risk of a premature identity foreclosure, these athletes with a strong and exclusive athletic identity may engage in sport beyond what would be considered healthy and possibly jeopardize their physical health (Brewer et al., 1993). Identity foreclosure is experienced when an individual has “made a commitment to occupational, ideological, and interpersonal ideas without engaging in exploratory behaviours” (Shachar et al., 2004, p. 73; Brewer et al., 1993) “while [this is] typically beneficial for the dominant role, often comes at the

cost of exploration of investment in other age appropriate or available roles” (Lally, 2007, p. 86). Identity foreclosure may occur in any aspect of life (e.g., occupational or athletic). Athletes have a high tendency to foreclose because “athletes are exceptionally committed and dedicated to their sport, devoting a significant amount of their time and energy to sport, usually to the exclusion of other activities. This is true for all sports” (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000, p. 127). Premature athletic identity foreclosure may present the athlete with challenges at various stages of their life due to many reasons, for example “the abandonment of the foreclosed identity may leave an athlete diffused” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 204) where they are unclear of what is next for them and who they really are.

The premature athletic identity foreclosure is more commonly experienced in highly committed athletes, because these are the athletes who “tend not to engage in exploratory behaviours and prepare themselves for future careers due to the demands of sport participation, and because such behaviour might put in question their aspirations to become professional athletes” (Shachar et al., 2004, p. 72). This idea supports the social athletic identity, and the athlete playing into the athlete role expectations to appeal to the public and to visibly show their dedication to the sport and their drive to reach their peak performance. Although premature identity foreclosure may be detrimental to an individual regardless of the identity that they have foreclosed on, the athletic environment indirectly encourages an athletic identity foreclosure through a combination of the athletes’ own aspirations and typical coaching methods. The “athletes’ own aspiration to reach the professional level are compatible with [the attitude of the coaches] not encourage[ing] athletes to expand their self-concept beyond the athlete role” (Shacher, et al., 2004, p. 82). The combination of the athletes’ own aspirations and the coaches level of dedication to the sport and potential lack of encouragement for the athletes to investigate

other areas of life, fosters the “highly competitive, pressure-provoking sport environment” (Shacher, et al., 2004, p. 82). Identity foreclosure may present itself as negative at various stages in the individuals’ life, but previous research has found that “a foreclosed [athletic] attitude is particularly maladaptive in the career development process following the transition out of sport” (Shacher, et al., 2004, p. 82).

**Athletic identities within the long distance running social world.** Shipway (2008) developed a typology by adapting Unruh’s (1979) “early exploration of social types” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). The typology “draw[s] distance running participants closer to the inner core of the running social world, ranging from the generic sport ‘outsider’ at one extreme to the experienced ‘insider’ on the other” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263) (see Figure 1). The four categories of participation in the long distance running social world, according to Shipway et al. (2012), are: “‘sporting outsiders’, ‘occasional casual participants’, ‘regular, recreational runners’, and ‘experienced long distance running insiders’” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263).

Figure 1

Sporting “Outsiders”	“Have no particular interest in running specifically, but actively participate in alternative sporting activities. They are detached from and unaware of the nuances and cultural meanings of distance running”
“Occasional” Casual Participants	“Have a basic understanding of distance running, which might only be used sporadically as part of their general health and

	fitness”
Regular, Recreational Runners	“Are a more regular, recreational participant, who might use the activity of running to complement other more primary forms of sport, exercise and/or physical activity. As such, as an activity, distance running is important for other reasons”
Experienced Long Distance Running “Insiders”	“Are normally members of a distance running club and familiar with the rules and rituals of that distance running ‘community’”

Figure 1. A description of the levels of individuals’ participation that is both experienced and noticeable within the social world of long distance running. (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263)

The term “sporting outsiders” represent the portion of the population who are not specifically interested in the sport of running, but they do participate in alternative activities; these individuals are not involved in the social world of long distance running and therefore are “detached from and unaware of the nuances and cultural meanings of distance running” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). The second division is termed “occasional” casual participants. These are the individuals who have a minimal understanding of the social world of long distance running as they participate only “sporadically as part of their general health and fitness [regimes]” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). The third division represents the athletes who participate regularly in long distance running, even if they are simply using it as a complementary activity to another avenue of exercise. Due to their regular participation, these individuals are aware of the social world of long distance running and are equally aware of their

place within the ‘running hierarchy’. Finally, the fourth division is made up of the experienced long distance runners, those who are classified as “insiders” within the long distance running social world (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). These individuals are most likely part of a running club, or a social group that shares the same interest in long distance running; they are also well aware of, and understand how to navigate the rules and rituals of this particular social context (Shipway et al., 2012).

Although this typology was developed with the recreational level of participation as its driving factor to understand the level of commitment to the social world of long distance running; this typology is able to expand and can therefore be applied to the competitive commitment levels of the long distance running participants. The final category of ‘experienced long distance runners’ would expand to include a sub-division of participants who represent the leading competitor long distance runners who most likely belong to a running club and are also “familiar with the rules and rituals of that distance running ‘community’” (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263).

The final category supports the sense of camaraderie that has been developed and was then visible during training and at races (Shipway et al., 2012). Navigating these four distinguishable groups is a critical first stage in the development of a long distance running athletic identity; the participants choose to enter the social world and then to further define themselves within the accepted behaviours and attitudes of that social world to begin to create their identity. Individuals who chose to identify more closely with the “sporting ‘outsiders’” were not considered for the purpose of this research as this research was designed to focus on the sport insiders, the ones who most closely identify with the sport. Once decisions have been made



around the level of involvement and commitment to the long distance running social world, the athlete then enters the next level of the identity tree.

The next level was developed by Smith (1998) as a standalone three tiered classification of “participant-group dynamics” in a sport of ‘individuals’. Smith (1998) has recognized distinctions between the terms ‘jogger’, ‘runner’, and ‘athlete’. The ‘jogger’ is an individual who may participate in ‘seasonal running’ and often participates in ‘fun runs’ or community races alike, but tends to stay away from ‘road races’ (Smith, 1998). Joggers “may be involved in some form of body maintenance activity, but what they do not do, as far as runners are concerned, is run” (Smith, 1998, p. 190). Runners tend to “run further, faster, and more often than joggers which develops and demonstrates a degree of physical prowess significantly greater than that which they attribute to joggers” (Smith, 1998, p. 182). The third classification -an ‘athlete’- is defined as “elite performers or athletes [who] comprise a very small portion of the field in most road races” (Smith, 1998, p. 179). The third classification described a high level of competition where “they were all acutely aware of just who their major rivals were” (Smith, 1998, p. 179).

These classifications are navigated by the individuals themselves; the more experience that the individuals gain within the long distance running social world, the more clear these distinctions become in their life and the more closely they will identify with the level of participation in which they are engaged. When an athlete closely identifies with the ‘regular recreational runner’ or the ‘experienced long distance runner’ categorizations of commitment levels, they are then at a higher understanding of the long distance running social world, and the rituals that go along with it. Once this intimate relationship has been formed, the individual is then better able to realize and see the importance of the classifications of the terms ‘jogger’,

‘runner’, and ‘athlete’ as they have been developed by the long distance running social world and hold a lot of power and identifying factors for the leading competitor participants.

These terms are highly valued by the individuals who fulfill each role; the defining characteristics for each term are fluid and are often viewed differently depending on the level from which the viewer is looking. The terms ‘jogger’, ‘runner’, and ‘athlete’ provide runners with a sense of community within any race in which they may be participating. Due to the high emotional attachment the runners develop within each of these groups, there are negative reactions displayed when they are mistakenly placed into a category of lower competitiveness (Shipway et al., 2012). The concept of ‘possible selves,’ ‘preferred selves,’ and ‘feared selves’ influence the individual while they are navigating their identities; this concept of the different selves may help the athletes arrange their identities and avoid an identity conflict (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). The concept of the three selves would help the athletes to identify the potential characteristics and lifestyle habits that they wish to abide by to allow them to portray the self-image which is more desirable and suiting to them. Once the athletes successfully navigate the three selves and determine the characteristics and behaviours that belong in each group, they are better able to build their athletic identity due to their full understanding how to best portray themselves.

**‘Possible selves’ as a decision making model.** Markus and Nurius (1986) have coined the concept of ‘possible selves’ and have developed three categories of the self that are considered as one navigates the life path. ‘Possible selves’ can be applied to life as a decision making process that is used by an individual at various stages to determine one’s most desirable way of living and most ideal self-portrayal in a social setting. The concept of ‘possible selves’ highlights three categories of selves that an individual navigates in order to better self-align their life with their

goals. The three categories are: ‘the possible selves’, ‘the preferred selves’, and ‘the feared selves’. The ‘feared selves’ are the ideas and portrayals that have been developed and deemed as negative in one’s life; the versions of themselves that they actively try to avoid. The ‘preferred selves’ are the ideas that the individual would like to obtain in life and then maintain their existence throughout. Finally, the ‘possible selves’ are the ideas that are made up of a combination of the ‘feared selves’ and the ‘preferred selves’; it is the cohesive all inclusive picture of what “the individuals would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006, p. 637). This concept of ‘possible selves’ was used in research conducted by Phoenix and Sparks (2006) that investigated the “narrative maps of aging” (p. 636) and how young athletes’ used them to perceive their futures.

The young athletes sifted through the ‘narrative maps of aging’ that were provided to them by the older generations in their families to consider and develop a perception of their individual future in athletics. The concept of the ‘possible selves’ can be generalized and applied to multiple avenues of life to help guide decisions about identity. With the consideration of the ‘possible selves’ thought through, the individual is better able to build a strong identity in any area of life and any social construct in which they participate. The concept of the ‘possible selves’ may be used as a decision making model as an individual navigates various identities as well as a means to strengthen the desirable identities by understanding which characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes they wish to obtain and to avoid. For the purpose of this research, the concept of ‘possible selves’ was used as a decision making model, as the interaction and consideration of the three selves play an important role in the identity creation and navigation of the individual, in this case, of the leading competitor masters runner. The leading competitor masters runners must constantly navigate this decision making model to ultimately choose which

‘self’ they are going to identify with for that given period of time. Throughout this process, runners would ideally behave in a way that would allow them to follow the path of their ‘preferred self’ but, sometimes in order to achieve that status, they must first briefly navigate a ‘feared self’ as a quick fix to ultimately avoid that ‘self’ all together. The ‘preferred self’ model helps the aging athletic population explore the changes in their physical abilities and in various aspects of their lives all in context to their personal beings. Athletes who align with their ‘preferred self’ for the majority of their journey would often experience an easy transition between life’s stages, as they are following their ideal life plan; these are the athletes who are most likely at peace with their aging journey and who are aging successfully. On the contrary, athletes who are living in a way that is purposely guided away from their ‘feared self’ may experience a higher level of uncertainty and may be living / performing in a way to simply avoid what they do not wish to experience in life, rather than living in a way that would allow them to experience all the things that they would like to.

**Family identity.** Each family houses unique bundles of identities, including the family’s collective identity, smaller groups’ (e.g., siblings, couples, parent-child) relational identities, and individual family members’ identities. Any “‘we’ [group of people] may perform its own rituals, stories, social dramas, everyday interactions, and intergenerational transfers and may be challenged and changed as it interacts with other identity bundles” (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 50).

A family identity is understood as the method in which an individual will label themselves within their family dynamic (e.g., mother, father, brother, sister) (Epp & Price, 2008). An athlete may associate with their family identity on a spectrum of closeness; the degree to which an athlete associates with their family identity can either encourage or inhibit the degree to which they are able to commit to their sport with the least amount of family friction (Dionigi

et al., 2012). The family is often described as an intense influential factor on the athlete; they hold the ability to influence the athlete in either a positive or a negative way. The perception and influence of the family may affect the athlete on an individual level depending on their level of commitment to the sport that they have previously obtained. Although, masters athletes do not necessarily rely on social support from their families in order to maintain their level of sport participation, regardless of whether or not they are new to the sport, the family dynamic may experience friction if the support is not given or received in an appropriate manner (Dionigi et al., 2012). On the negative side, the “lack of acceptance and allowance of sport participation by spouses or children can be a potential source of conflict if it is not managed effectively within the family” (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 385).

For the masters’ athlete, conflict between their family identity and their athletic identity is an important area of their life to pay attention to and work towards navigating the conflict and finding a resolution. When potential conflicts have been discussed and managed at the family level, there is an increase in the family’s negotiation strategies, which may increase the athlete’s motivation and vice versa (Dionigi et al., 2012). Within the nuclear family structure, gender roles are abided by and fulfilled on an everyday basis. Due to the strong presence of the gendered family roles within society, the “gender roles in the family and their influence on leisure [as well as competitive sport] participation must be considered” (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 384). These gender roles are formed by the traditional gender roles of the wife taking care of the children and the house during the day, while the husband is out of the house working; as well, these gender roles may be negotiated by the individual family and, from there, they may deviate to better conform to the individual family. The ties that are formed by marriage and parenting are “established through the nuclear family [and] are at the core of people’s social networks”

(Wellman, 1990 as cited in Logan et al., 1992, p. 464). The gendered family roles are experienced in everyday life, often both inside and outside of the house; they have the ability to affect and influence the individual at various levels, including their ability in, and commitment to, their sport. In 2012, Dionigi et al. supported the idea that female athletes spoke more than male athletes about “feeling guilty because they were not attending to chores around the house; how children influenced their involvement in sport; and choosing family before [leisure] sport” (p. 384). These experiences have a reciprocal relationship with the individual’s athletic identity and their gender specific family identity. “Thompson (1999), found that women who were players of sport themselves went to great lengths to ensure their participation did not interfere with domestic duties or their support for family members” (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 384). In the same study by Dionigi et al. (2012), the “men [when involved in sport] spoke more than women about their spouse having to take on extra childcare and domestic responsibilities to ensure they could play and train for their sport, especially when their spouse was not an athlete” (p. 384).

As masters athletes may have multiple identities; family and athletic identity are the two identities of focus. Although athletes have expressed their desire and commitment to following traditional gendered family roles, the family dynamic is brought to a new level of negotiation and need for communication when both the spouses are athletes (Dionigi et al., 2012). In this case, in a study done by Stevenson (2002), they found “examples of men staying at home with the children while their wives participated in [sport] and vice versa” (p. 384). This is one example of the sacrifice to both the family dynamic as well as the sport participation the individuals must navigate appropriately to ensure they are meeting the requirements for both avenues of life.

Entering further into the twentieth century, families may still be following the traditional nuclear family structure, but they often establish gender neutrality within the family roles and

responsibilities. The changes in the modern nuclear family influence the expectations that family roles have and further allow for individuals to simultaneously navigate multiple roles and identities with flexible role requirements; the individuals now have more freedom to express themselves and to seek what is important to them. “Generational time places a person within a family context and roles within the family” (Scanlon □ Mogel & Roberto, 2004, p. 34), supporting the idea that as generations grow and develop through society, so do their expectations and the norms of the individuals who are fulfilling the family roles, such as a mother or a father. “Similar to the experiences of committed masters swimmers in a study by Stevenson (2002), our participants reorganized their schedules to accommodate for sport, family, and work commitments regardless of gender” (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 384). The more fluid family dynamic, in terms of roles and responsibilities may prove to be an effective method to managing multiple identities (e.g., gendered, family, and occupational identities) that are described today in western society.

## **Injury**

Training and racing as a long-distance runner require the body to work in remarkable ways (Tulle, 2007). “Running injuries are common... [and] evidence suggests that running mileage and previous injury are important predictors of running injury” (Fields, 2011, p. 299). “The injury rate for master’s runners, [is] in fact, higher than younger runners” (McKean, Manson, & Stanish, 2006, p. 152). Training for long distance running alone has a large impact on the body. “While running, the repetitive impact of each foot strike transmits forces to the body estimated to be 2 or 3 times the body weight of the runner” (Sanchez, Corwell, & Berkoff, 2006, p. 608).

Speculations about the potential causes of greater muscle injury in older runners include age-related changes in the muscle tendon unity such as decreased strength and increased stiffness. A second possible explanation is that the normal muscle injury that occurs with training seems to take greater time to repair with aging, and older runners continue running at a frequency similar to that of younger runners. (Fields, 2011, p. 299)

With a reduced recovery capacity, there could be “a negative effect on training quality and sport performance [but there could also be an] increase [in] the risk of musculoskeletal injury” (Borges, Reaburn, Driller, & Argus, 2016, p. 152). Experienced masters runners are able to detect and identify the differences between the onset of injuries and the “usual small niggles which plague the habitual runner” (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008, p. 6). Along with realizing the differences between serious injuries and smaller niggles that may be viewed as annoying or slight discomforts, “a serious runner... comes to accept [a] level of pain or discomfort as normal; one may not like it, but one tolerates it in order to... run the distance and to race with some degree of efficiency” (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008, p. 10-11). The outlook on the injury recovery process may change over time, as the athlete grows older and may experience more injuries or a shift in their views on their abilities and health of their body. Over time, runners may “gradually learn to adopt a more compassionate attitude towards [their] bodies... whereas previously... [they] would have trained on indomitably, regardless of pain” (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008, p. 31). Injury awareness and injury prevention are important for the masters runners population because “the musculoskeletal system of this population undergoes significant changes with time, including decreases in strength, flexibility, bone density, and proprioception and also joint degeneration” (McKean et al., 2006, p. 149). Along with physical changes seen in the body that relate to the rate of injury seen within the masters runner population, “when



injuries strike, [masters] athletes are at heightened risk of ‘biographical disruption, because the prognosis is held to be poor’ (Tulle, 2007, p. 340). To offset the prevalence of injuries seen within the master running population, the “more-experienced runners are more likely [to] have better baseline training techniques, which may lower injury rate during [a] training program” (Chorley, Cianca, Divine, & Hew, 2002, p. 23). With the increase in potential injuries seen within the master athlete population, recovery time and the recovery process are things that must be considered. The recovery process, depending on the severity of the injury and therefore the length of the recovery, may in fact have a large impact on the athlete and their ability to train and perform at their normal level. Treatment interventions may range from the use of crutches, where time off from running is required, the use of compression sleeves, where they are able to run with some modifications, to less invasive treatment interventions including decreased run times and the incorporation of alternate training (Fields & Rigby, 2016).

### **The Uncharted Literature Gaps**

Athletes have been of interest to many researchers over the years as competitive and recreational sport has increased in popularity. Due to the baby boom generation, masters level sport has seen a dramatic increase in the number of participants who are competing each year. This population offers researchers a unique, yet notable cohort of individuals who deserve the attention of academics to navigate and investigate the combination of sport and age.

existing studies that have examined the relationship between physical activity and health outcomes have typically examined only single dimensions of health (e.g., physical or psychological health) and have not considered individuals at the highest end of the physical activity involvement continuum (e.g., Masters athletes) as a separate group (Baker et al., 2010, p. 9)

Along with the novelty in research surrounding masters level athletes' physical and psychological health, there is a gap in literature, where their identities have yet to be explored. Combining leading competitor masters' level athletes with research on identity and athletic identity, in context of training in Sudbury, Ontario, is a research topic that needs attention to allow society to gain a better understanding of this unique, society altering population. Environmental interventions, such as environmental characteristics (trails and naturally appearing openings, physical activity enhancing facilities) have been studied in previous research articles and the "potential for [these] environmental interventions to promote activity are substantial" (Bauman, Smith, Stoker, Bellew, & Booth, 1999, p. 322). "It has been suggested that environmental factors may enable or present barriers to physical activity" (Bauman et al., 1999, p. 322). This knowledge, along with the recognition of Sudbury, Ontario's intense trail system and the unique harsh weather patterns, while considering the unique population of master level leading competitor long distance runners that reside in Sudbury, is definitely worthy of investigation. Investigating the leading competitor masters level (age 50+) long distance runners who train in Sudbury, Ontario would provide an insight into the identities, identity patterns, life paths, and mental strategies that these athletes use in order maintain their competitive status while training in such a unique geographical location. The novelty in this current research project provided answers to the research question (How do leading competitor masters level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in?) and investigated the various methods that master level leading competitor long distance runners use to maintain their competitive status over the years. This information is critical to be understood in order to benefit master level leading competitors and their individual journeys through sport, or, more specifically, long distance running. This research provided

insight into the identity management process that these athletes engaged with, in order to live a balanced life, the identity management process allowed them to thrive and navigate all their various chosen identities. This research also paved the way for future research to further expand the current knowledge on the master level athletes and what is unique that allows them to remain highly competitive and healthy (/ injury free, to some degree). The participants of this research project came from a very specific tight-knit sub-culture, which may have influenced other researchers to investigate the smaller and potentially more unique sub-populations within the many facets of this research project, such as: identity, long distance running, masters athletes, and geographical locations.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of the present research was to investigate how the leading competitor masters level long distance runners who train in Sudbury, Ontario were able to maintain their lead competitor status relative to their age category. The following question was explored in relation to this overarching purpose: How do leading competitor masters level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in?

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

In this chapter I outlined the methodology that has been used to answer the research question of interest. Within this chapter, I exposed an overview of myself, the context in which the current research project is situated, as well as offered information on the data collection and the data analysis procedures, and addressed authenticity within the realm of this research. The first phase of the research project was data analysis. The data analysis was conducted by using an interpretive thematic analysis approach, following guidelines from Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis offers two varying forms of implication; I used the Big Q in order to ensure that she, as the author, remained an active role throughout the duration of the research project. The Big Q version of thematic analysis is “a strand not anchored in a particular theoretical tradition, which can therefore be applied flexibility across the spectrum of ontological and epistemological positions” (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016, p. 192). I used the thematic analysis process in an inductive fashion, this meaning that the analysis started from the data and followed a ‘bottom-up’ approach. With the inductive approach, the data were coded with a latent mindset. A latent mindset means to “code and develop analysis around more implicit ideas or concepts that underpin what’s explicitly expressed” (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016, p. 192).

My ontological standpoint is critical realism, as the research was guided by the belief that reality as a whole is objective, in the sense that reality is never fully attained or understood. This influenced my epistemological standpoint, which is post-positivist. Post-positivism is the standpoint that believes it is impossible to gain access to the truth from conducting interviews with participants, as both participants’ subjective biases and my biases that are reflected in the interpretation of the participants’ words (Henderson, 2011). “There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with

the realities of our world. There is no meaning without a mind” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8-9).

Reflectivity was a part of this research process, as I, the researcher, had an active role throughout the duration of the project.

Once the participants had been recruited and written consent had been granted, the participants fulfilled two requirements. First, they completed a demographic questionnaire and second, they participated in two individual conversational interviews. The demographic questionnaire briefly asked each participant about their athletic careers and any major events in which they participated. The conversational interviews were a holistic, participant led conversation about the uniqueness of training and racing in Sudbury at their age; a conversation focusing on their running journeys. Data analysis was conducted by using interpretive thematic analysis. The six phases of thematic analysis guided this process.

### **Research Tradition**

Research traditions for qualitative research have been divided into two forms, when considering thematic analysis as the analysis of choice; this division was developed by Kidder and Fine (1987). The two forms of thematic analysis are small q and Big Q; small q is the “strand tied to a realist ontological framework” (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016, p. 192) and Big Q is “not anchored in a particular theoretical tradition” (Braun et al., 2016, p. 192), meaning it can be applied to various ontological and epistemological positions. The three differencing “factors between these forms of research are found and identified within the conceptualizations of knowledge, research, and the researcher” (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015, p. 96). The form of thematic analysis that was used for this project is the Big Q. Big Q has been accepted as the appropriate form due to the increased acknowledgement of the active role that I maintain during the entire process, from the data collection to the final write-up. Big Q requires me to act as a

“sculptor” in the sense that my job is to maintain an active role in chipping through the data set, with the final product being a sculpture. The “sculpture is a product of [the] interaction between the sculptor, their skills and the raw material” (Braun et al., 2015, p. 96). The thematic analysis was used in an inductive fashion, meaning that the coding and the analysis started from the data and followed a ‘bottom-up’ approach. The analysis was used in an inductive manner, although “pure induction is never possible, because our standpoints and ontological epistemological and theoretical frameworks always shape how we read and interpret data” (Braun et al., 2015, p. 97) and therefore deductive tendencies may have also been seen. Although pure induction is not attainable, I “can aim to ground [their] analytical observations in the data rather than in prior theory” (Braun et al., 2015, p. 97) allowing for the development of an inductive approach to be as clear and clean as possible. With the focus on an inductive approach, the data were coded with a latent (covert) mindset.

### **Ontology and Epistemology**

Thematic analysis offers a researcher great flexibility, as it “only specifies analytical procedures, centred on coding and theme development” (Braun et al., 2015, p. 96) and therefore it is open to be guided by a variety of ontological and epistemological viewpoints to answer an assortment of research questions, as well as can be used to analyze most types of data. Crotty (1998) described epistemology as a theoretical perspective of the way people look at the world and how they make sense of it. “For each theoretical perspective embodies a certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means to know* (epistemology).” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10; emphasis in original) “Ontology is the study of being. It is concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality and such.” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10)

The ontological viewpoint that was used for this research project was critical realism. Bhaskar popularized critical realism through his work during the 1970's and 1980's (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Critical realism can be broken down into two parts, whereas it is *realist* due to the fact there is “an existing, causally efficacious, world independent of our knowledge” (Mingers, Mutch, & Willcocks, 2013, p. 795). Critical realism is also *critical* because of the perceptual and theoretical lenses belonging to human beings that will always limit access to the world (Mingers et al., 2013). Critical realism is the perspective that reality as a whole is objective, in the sense that it is never fully attainable or identified as the access to the truth is always mediated by cultural understandings, human subjectivity, biases, and the limits of our cognition (Crotty, 1998). Ultimately, the truth of the participant's running journeys exists independently of the mind, although information about their reality is sought through their socially produced knowledge of their journey. This describes the transitive and intransitive domains of critical realism. The athlete's running journey exists independently of the mind (i.e., intransitive), but information is gained about this running journey through socially produced knowledge from the athlete, thus representing the intransitive domain (Marshall, 2012). Critical realism led the project to a post-positivist epistemological standpoint. Again, epistemological standpoint used to describe the way people look at the world and how they make sense of it (Crotty, 1998). A post-positivist standpoint is the understanding that it is never possible to gain direct access to the “truth” from interviews with participants as a result of both participants' subjective biases and the researchers' biases that are seen reflected in their interpretation of the participants' words. Reality, in full, can also never be captured completely by human knowledge, as human knowledge is limited to only being able to capture a small portion of reality.

## **Reflectivity**

Reflection and reflective practice have been investigated over time; in the early stages reflection has been described as “the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective” (Boyd & Fales, 1983, p. 100). Since then, reflection has been developed to the concept of a reflective practice which was then defined as “an approach to training and practice that can help practitioners explore their decisions and experiences in order to increase their understanding of and manage themselves and their practice” (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 189). A “reflective practice is about adopting an approach to practice that requires practitioners [and researchers] to be open and questioning” (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 192). A reflective process is important for a researcher to delve into to benefit themselves as a researcher as well as their professional practice.

As the lead researcher of this project, I engaged in a reflective process as it allowed me to dedicate the time needed to look inwards and examine my biases, values, and views that I brought to the research. Engaging in a reflective practice also allowed me to investigate how the participants may view the interactions with me, as well as the interview process. Reflectively, I have examined who I am as an individual and as a researcher. Through this process I gained a better understanding of my biases, values, and views; this process continued throughout the entirety of the current research project to ensure my role as a researcher was always active.

Academically, I have been driven by my strong interest in the Sport Psychology aspect of sport and understanding that there is much more to sport than the physical aspect of an athlete. I have completed a Bachelor of Arts specializing in Sport Psychology, followed by a Bachelor of Education. I am now completing a Masters of Human Kinetics with a focus on Sport



Psychology. My interest in Sport Psychology was found during my high school years as I was an athlete, playing rugby and competing in both summer and winter biathlons, as well as engaging in recreational running. Being an athlete offered me the first hand experience in acknowledging the missing link where sport psychology, the consideration of the mind in the success of the athlete, comes into play. During my first four years of post-secondary education my focus was on my academics, but I quickly realized that something in my life was missing and the desire to participate in a sport was growing. After being recruited as a member of the Laurentian University Cross Country and Indoor Track team, my interest in being a long distance runner in the area of Sudbury, Ontario began to take flight. The geographical location of Sudbury, and more specifically the university, very close to the trail systems offered unique training grounds for runners of all levels and abilities which were of great interest to me. Throughout my continued experience as a varsity athlete, witnessing the cohesive running population in Sudbury caught my interest.

Through my running journey at Laurentian University, my unique exposure to the running population, which was inclusive of all ages, as well as my exposure to the trail systems and the specific geographical location, led me to the academic research idea that I am now investigating. The long distance running population who are 50 years of age or older were the targeted population for this research project because of the unique and dynamic life course that they have navigated and that has lead them to where they are now as long distance runners; as well, this has been expressed as a time of potential physical decline. The unique life path created individualized life stories for each of these research participants, which offered them a full picture of the identities and experiences that have allowed these athletes to reach and maintain a high level of success throughout their long distance running careers. As the researcher of long

distance runner's identities and as a competitive long distance runner, at the university level myself, I had to navigate and understand my preconceived beliefs and biases that could have affected the research throughout the entire process.

Having developed my own beliefs and identities that I use to remain a competitive long distance runner, I had to recognize and be aware of them throughout the research process. This was especially crucial during the data collection, conversational interviews, and data analysis stages. During the conversational interviews, it was important for me to be aware of my biases as well as my preconceived ideas surrounding the topic of long distance running at the competitive level in the north. This was important because understanding the participant's story was in the interest of the participant and the research project. Simply being aware of my preconceived ideas and biases surrounding this topic would not eliminate or minimize them; I consciously worked to ensure my biases were not put on the participants and to understand what they were saying without filling in the blanks with my thoughts, but rather I asked for clarification from the participants themselves. I viewed myself in relation to this topic as an individual who has a solid understanding of the physical ability as well as the high level of mental toughness that is required in order to train and compete in the unique geographical location of Sudbury, Ontario. With this previous knowledge, I was able to gather a clear understanding of the identities and methods that the 50 year plus runner population uses to maintain their leading competitor status, all while being exposed to, tested, and encouraged by their geographical location, Sudbury. The reflectivity portion of this research project highlighted the notion that, as a researcher, I would always relate to the data, but I would also admit I could never fully eliminate this due to human nature.

## **Context: Masters Running in Northern Ontario**

Long distance running is a “physically vigorous and demanding sport... somewhat unusual, though of course not unique” (Smith, 1998, p. 175). The outdoor aspect allows the standardized race distance of a half marathon (21.1km) and a full marathon (42.2km) to vary greatly in the level of difficulty the runners would be faced with throughout the duration of the course; whether the race course was on the road, on a trail, or through various terrains and elevations. Sudbury, Ontario offers the leading competitor long distance runners a great deal of trail circuits that allow the runner to train on road, trail material, such as gravel, as well as to train at various elevations. Sudbury, Ontario also offers the leading competitor long distance runners a wide range of weather throughout the year. Depending on how the individual internalizes the extreme weather conditions, the weather can act either as an encouraging or a debilitating aspect to the individual’s training. Training in various weather conditions can benefit the athletes in a number of ways, allowing them to determine ways in which they will be able to cope and even thrive within each condition. On race day, “to run the fastest time possible... ‘ideal’ weather conditions are essential” (Spellman, 1996, p. 118) to the athlete and their ability to perform to their highest potential. The nature of long distance running often requires the athlete to train in one geographical location and to compete in various other locations, as well as their home training grounds. Long distance runners who reside in northern Ontario, more specifically in Sudbury, may travel to compete in half marathons and marathons across the globe. For these athletes who compete in various locations racing on hot days [or in hot locations], if not acclimatized could pose problems, even more so if the majority of their training program was done in the cold (winter, evenings) (Spellman, 1996). The weather conditions in Sudbury may also provide the

athlete with an advantage if the race was held in the colder months, during the same time period that the athlete had been training on those trails.

Long distance races have a unique atmosphere due to the nature of the terrain and race course on which the athletes are required to run. Depending on the level, the popularity, and the degree to which the course is viewer friendly, the number of spectators and roadside observers may greatly fluctuate, affecting the race atmosphere and the individual athletes on various levels. Specifically, for half marathon and marathon races that take place during the winter months in Sudbury, Ontario, assuming the colder weather, the event may be faced with a smaller roadside observer population, and this could ultimately lead to the athletes receiving less support while they are out on the course (Spellman, 1996). Sudbury's long distance race courses are unique and exclusive to their geographical location. With the intense nature of these standardized race distances (5k, 10k, half marathon, marathon) running through the complex trail system has inherently made these slower courses.

The Ramsey Lake Tour is a great example of what a Sudbury race consists of. This race course is brutally tough in that it includes many of the tough trail sections, such as cardiac hill which goes through the wooded trail area. This race course is laid out in a way that the majority of the race is run traveling up hill, constantly challenging each participant on a physical and mental level where the athlete must remain positive and engaged in the race. Going beyond the Ramsey Lake Tour, the age 50+ leading competitor runner population residing in Sudbury is inherently tough and unpampered as they have been running and training in a wide variety of weather conditions, going as cold as -40 during the long winter months and as hot as +35 during the intense heat of the summer months. Running outdoors in the winter months wearing spikes is one example of a challenge that these athletes are faced with in order to remain competitive and

successful in their athletic pursuits. Running and training in these conditions requires the athletes to go beyond the single act of running to ensure that they are able to compete at their fullest potential; for example, these athletes must highly consider hydration, proper fueling, and clothing choices.

### **Participants and Recruitment**

The participants sought for the study had the following characteristics: they had performed at the leading competitor level in the last three years while they were over the age of 50 and training in Sudbury, Ontario. This study recruited three participants, all male, with an age range starting at 50 years with no age cut-off point, matching the Canadian Masters Athletics Association. These participants must have completed a half marathon or marathon race within the New York City qualifying times while over the age of 50. Due to the idiosyncratic nature of this community, women were not found to match the criteria for the current study. The participants of interest were those who were free from illness and free from serious injury; this delimitation was important to have due to the possible age of the participants. Participants were recruited for this study mainly by word of mouth due to the tight knit long distance running community that is available and present in Sudbury, Ontario. A good contact point for the recruitment of runners who met the research characteristics was the Sudbury Masters Running Club, as this is a well recognized and prevalent group amongst the Greater Sudbury population. These participants were asked to, firstly, complete a demographic questionnaire and then to participate in two individual conversational interviews that were not restricted by a definite time line. These interviews were as long as the participant wished, as it was their story that they were telling. Each of these participants came from different walks of life; I interviewed a serious lifetime runner, a born again masters runner, and a new-to-the-sport master runner. The

participants each represented one of the three masters runner categories, this was not purposefully done. They differed within their life paths, chosen careers (e.g., elementary school teacher, machinist, etc.), starting point to their running journey (e.g., late 20s, age 40, throughout his lifetime) and their adherence to a training regimen. Each participant offered an abundance of insight into their running journey and how their athletic identity weaved in and out throughout their descriptions of their experience.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process started with each participant filling out a brief demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to inquire about various aspects of the athlete and their athletic journey that they have accomplished to date. Following the demographic questionnaire, each of the participants was asked to participate in two separate conversational interviews. These conversational interviews provided the participants with the opportunity to share their stories about their athletic pursuits, about themselves in a more holistic manner, as well as about the uniqueness of training and racing in Sudbury, Ontario at their age. These interviews were open ended and participant lead, which allowed the participant to share what they felt was necessary to contribute to this research project. These interviews were conducted in two separate locations: the Laurentian University Library and at one of the participant's place of employment. These locations were chosen based on the convenience to the participants and as a place where the participants felt comfortable. All of the interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

**Demographic questionnaire.** A demographic questionnaire was used to gather data on each individual athlete in terms of differentiating and grouping factors such as gender, age, years of experience, at what age their athletic career started, any formal coaching support received,

previous or ongoing injuries, hours of training each day, level of education achieved, and athletic accomplishments. These factors allowed me to gain a better, more holistic understanding of the group of participants with whom we worked. For the purpose of this research, understanding the athlete on a holistic level was important due to the nature of the development, maintenance, conflicting and supplementing identities that they navigated in order to remain competitive in long distance running. The completion of the demographic questionnaire occurred before the conversational interviews were conducted; the demographic questionnaire was used as a starting point. The demographic questionnaire informed the project on the individualistic and shared experiences between these master level runners, this helped develop the project by further highlighting the uniqueness of this population and reinforcing the need for this research. The demographic questionnaire also acted as an ice breaker, as it was the first task that the participant and I did together. This was the first face-to-face step in building the rapport that was an important aspect of the professional relationships that were formed over the course of the data collection process.

**Conversational interviews.** Conversational interviews were used as the data collection method. The “conversations developed in interviews are an indispensable source of rich and new knowledge about social and personal aspects of our lives” (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 107). I implemented conversational interviews to collect the data due to the high level of participant control. The participants controlled how and what was said about their insight into the “temporal dimensions of human life” (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 109). The unstructured and open-ended nature of the conversational interviews invited the participants to engage in a rich level of storytelling (Schinke, Blodgett, McGannon, & Ge, 2016). Conversational interviews “honor the tradition of storytelling as a means of transmitting knowledge, beliefs, and values (Blodgett et

al., 2014, p. 348) further proving its' importance and relevance to qualitative research. The participant led inquiry can help the researcher to "elicit untold stories and insights" (Blodgett et al., 2014, p. 354). This interview method allowed for the ease of conversation to flow naturally with an emphasis on the flexibility of the direction of the conversation; rather than the narrow focus of a set of pre-determined questions. During the interview I probed for more information where more information would be readily available. These probes were provided "in relation to the themes brought up by the participants" (Blodgett et al., 2014, p. 348). This "encourage[ed] the participants to reflect... eliciting richer descriptions" (Blodgett et al., 2014, p. 348).

Interviews... are opportunities and spaces for people to often tell long, in-depth, rich, and contradictory stories about their thoughts, emotions, and lives in ways they may not have done previously, and in a manner that quicker and cleaner methods can suppress. (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 280)

The conversational interview allowed the emphasis to be placed on the social interactions that were occurring between the interviewer and the interviewee throughout the entirety of the interview. The data that were obtained throughout the interview was viewed as co-constructed material (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). This reinforced that "an interviewer can exert an influence on how the interviewee expresses things and shapes what can and cannot be said" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 284), although offset with the ease of a conversational interview. In terms of the temporal dimensions that a researcher and participant are able to gain access to within the human life are "past events, present actions, and imagined futures" (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 109). This allowed the research to be conducted using a holistic lens, investigating all areas of the individuals' life. Interviews are a powerful tool in qualitative research because they are a data collection method where "all the senses are used in creating meaning and understanding" (Smith



& Sparkes, 2016, p. 114). It is the social interaction that allows the participant as well as the researcher to co-construct knowledge. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim; they took place at either the Laurentian University Library or one of the participant's place of employment, wherever the participant felt most comfortable.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis (TA) using interpretive induction to guide the process. Thematic analysis is an “accessible and theoretical-flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 2) that assists researchers by allowing for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Interpretive TA was chosen it “can align with linking thematic categories and meanings derived from ‘data’” (Oghene et al., 2015, p. 744). Using TA, themes and sub-themes were developed from the data to further create a thematic map. This thematic map included excerpts from the data to supplement and support the themes and sub-themes that have been developed. Interpretive induction, the ‘bottom-up approach’ was used to navigate the data and to better understand that “the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves” (Patton, 1990 as cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 12).

Along with the use of interpretive induction approach, a latent approach was used – latent “goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to indentify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations” (Patton, 1990 as cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 13, emphasis in original). The first phase to thematic analysis is the *familiarization* phase; this is where the authors immerse themselves into the textual data by reading it over a number of times and connecting with the data on an intimate level (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). During this phase, it is also important that the author makes notes to highlight potential items of interest;

these notes would be very broad and general as they would “typically be a stream of consciousness, a messy rush of ideas, rather than a polished prose” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 61). For this project, familiarization with the data set was done with both audio and visual exposure in a repetitive fashion where ample time was spent getting to know and understand the data on an intimate level. The audio familiarization was done by listening to the recorded version of the conversational interviews until a high level of familiarization was reached; the visual exposure was done by first transcribing each interview with great detail and then using the transcripts to get exposure to the data in a written format. The second phase involves *generating initial codes*; this is where the author generates codes on both the descriptive and interpretative level on pieces of the data that are relevant to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Coding the data is the first step into organizing the data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding the transcribed versions of the conversational interviews occurred in multiple steps to ensure the data were interpreted correctly and to also ensure that important pieces of the data were not missed or overlooked. Phase three, *searching for themes* “begins when all data ha[s] been initially coded and collated” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 19) and a coherent list of the various codes attached to the data are identified.

An important element is to consider how the themes relate to one another and how they will relate to one another in telling the story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This ensured the overall story properly represented the data that were collected for the masters’ level elite runners. Phase four, *reviewing potential themes*, “begins when you have devised a set of candidate themes, [and] involves the refinement of those themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20). Braun and Clarke (2012) described this theme as essentially quality checking, as it is at this point where the themes are considered in terms of their relevance, uniqueness, and likeness to one another. At

this point, Patton’s (1990) “dual criteria for judging categories [of] internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity – are worth considering” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20). Phase five, *defining and naming themes*, begins when a “satisfactory thematic map of [the] data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22) has been created. During this phase, defining each theme and highlighting each theme’s singular focus and what was unique about it, was important to the development of each theme individually, as well as to each theme as they were related to one another to tell the over arching story of the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The final phase, phase six, *producing the report*, begins when the themes have been considered and accepted as the proper representation of the data that is actively acknowledged by the author. “The task of the write-up of a thematic analysis... is to tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23).

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
Analysis	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
	7	Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
Overall	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as <i>active</i> in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

Figure 2. Braun and Clarke’s 15 point check list of inductive thematic analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96)

### **Authenticity and Quality/Rigor**

Ensuring a high degree of authenticity is important while conducting qualitative research.

Authenticity must be considered throughout the entire research process to ensure the written

report properly shares the stories collected through the data collection – interview process. First of all, “researchers must acknowledge the “socially constructed” ethics within qualitative research, by considering the relational issues that are part... of human research” (Blodgett, Boyer, & Turk, 2005, para. 1). The relationship that was built between the participant and I was very important. It greatly affected the research in terms of how the participants shared their stories based on the level of comfort they received from the research situation and the rapport built between themselves and the researcher. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 96) have developed a 15-point checklist that researchers are able to use to ensure they are conducting and facilitating a good thematic analysis; they have categorized the 15-point checklist into five stages. The first stage is made-up of only one point. The first of the 15-points touches on remaining authentic during the transcription phase; this includes incorporating an appropriate amount of detail into each, spending time to check each transcript against the originally recorded tapes for accuracy (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016, p. 203). This stage was very important to take the time to ensure a high degree of authenticity has been reached, due to the weight of the project that is placed on working with the data the way it was intended to be shared.

The second stage is where the researcher begins to code the data. In this stage, the researcher must ensure that they have given each of the data items “equal attention in the coding process” (Braun et al., 2016, p. 203); ensuring that the “coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive” (Braun et al., 2016, p. 203). This assisted me in developing themes that were not based solely off a few vivid examples but came straight from the data set. The third stage is grouped and titled “analysis;” this grouping offers guidance including ensuring the “data has been analyzed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described” (Braun et

al., 2016, p. 203). This was very important to the overall written report as it represented and demonstrated the interaction that I had with the raw data set.

The fourth stage is titled “overall” and this section is used to identify an important item that must be considered throughout the entirety of the research project, and that is to allocate enough time to each of the phases to allow adequate completion to occur (Braun et al., 2016). The final stage is the “written report”; this stage encompasses the final four points on the checklist describing specific ways in which authenticity should be considered during the writing phase of the entire project. Establishing consistency between the method that was described and used and the analysis is an example of an item that should be highly considered throughout the write-up phase of the entire project (Braun et al., 2016).

With one of my end goals being authenticity, it was important to realize there were many beliefs that have been developed based on the purest way to achieve a high level of authenticity. Blodgett et al. (2005) stands on one end of the spectrum emphasizing the need to gain the perspective of the participants by “walk[ing] in their shoes and feel[ing] their pebbles” (p. 16), as this is an empathetic strategy. Milne (2005) offered a different approach to how authenticity and relationships between the participants and the researcher should be built. “To claim that one can [walk in someone else’s shoes], would seem... to be claiming more than is possible based on our variable experiences” (Milne, 2005, para. 5). The end goal of authenticity remained a focus throughout the research, it “would not only ensure that our methods of collecting data are pristine but that our data is also faithful to the constructions of *all stakeholders*” (Milne, 2005, para. 8). I also kept a research journal which was used to record thoughts about each interview once the interview had taken place; the research journal was written immediately after the completion of the interview to ensure thoughts were not left out nor forgotten.

The rigor and quality of qualitative research has been investigated and further developments have been offered that are opposed to previous ways of identifying quality research; “historically popular qualitative methods and methodologies might now need rejecting, corrective action, or exigent deliberation” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 102). For qualitative research, identifying and achieving rigor is a fundamental way of recognizing the quality of research; “researchers, reviewers, journal editors, and research panel members” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 103) view rigor in this way. For the current research project, rigor was obtained by member reflections and the use of a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Member reflections are an updated, revised, and reframed version of member checking; this revision was necessary due to many issues that were seen with member checking in its initial form. Member reflections were used in order to “generate additional data and insight” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 108) into the initial interview and the story of the participant. This allowed rigor to be achieved by recognizing that it was impossible to collect or achieve theory-free knowledge. Member reflections are a co-participatory process which is acknowledged as a benefit to quality research, as the member reflections are “a practical opportunity to acknowledge and/or explore with participants the contradictions and differences in knowing” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 108). Member reflections provided this research with an opportunity to gain insight on the shared information which allowed it to become more robust and meaningful to the research at hand.

The second method of attaining rigor for this research project was the use of a critical friend; a revised method of inter-rater reliability. Using critical friends to achieve rigor within a qualitative research project is the “process of critical dialogue between people, with researchers giving voice to their interpretations in relation to other people who listen and offer critical feedback” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113). Critical friends play a role that is very important

to the research and the development of the themes, their job is to “encourage reflection upon, and exploration of, multiple and alternative explanations and interpretations as these emerged in relation to the data and writing” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113). For this project, two critical friends were used to add to the project’s authenticity. One critical friend used for this research project was another academic, who has experience within the long distance running community in Sudbury, Ontario. He benefited this research due to the fact that he had a high degree of understanding of the importance of rigor and quality within qualitative research. He offered guidance through the pilot interview process that was carried out with him as the interviewee, as well as he continued to offer feedback on the interview process throughout. The second critical friend resourced throughout this project was my supervisor, as he is an academic who is well experienced in sport psychology research and a long distance runner from the masters group. He was resourced throughout the project by challenging ideas and concepts that were discussed to ensure they were relevant, detailed, and true to the descriptions of the experiences. He added to the authenticity of the project by reviewing each step, encouraging further investigations where necessary, and offering insight and clarity into the experience of being a member of this long distance running group in Sudbury. This enhanced the authenticity of the project as he provided a strong connection between the academic and firsthand experience sides of the project.

## **Chapter Four: Results and Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to identify the salient identities of masters' level long distance runners, as well as to identify the importance and the strength of the athletic identity throughout the athletes' life and further to investigate the master athletes' current destination as a snapshot in time. The current study explored the lives of three leading competitor masters' athletes through conversational interviews. An inductive thematic analysis was used to answer the research question (How do leading competitor masters' level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today and the context they are training in). I open this chapter with a rationale and a description of creative non-fiction followed by the rationale and description of portrait vignettes. Creative research accounts were developed as portrait vignettes; with the final vignette being an amalgamation of all the similarities that were expressed among all three participants. The structure of the chapter started with a section designed to set the stage for the interaction between the athlete and me and then to introduce the first participant's artefacts. This was followed by the vignette and then the discussion of the vignette. This structure was repeated four times, once for each vignette.

### **Creative Non-fiction**

Creative non-fiction, formally known as 'new journalism,' or 'literary non-fiction is the action of "blend[ing] factual content and fiction form" (Agar, 2012, p. 116). Creative non-fiction has progressed from 'new journalism' in the 1960s (Agar, 2012). Creative non-fiction is a method that produces stories that are "not made up or wholly imagined but are based on empirical data systematically collected... [where] each story is fictional in form yet factual in content" (Smith, McGannon, & Williams, 2015, p. 59). Creative non-fiction was chosen for this project for its ability to show rather than tell the reader the athletes' descriptions of their



experiences, and its ability to follow the lives of ‘rounded characters’ or, in this case, the participants that were chosen for this project (Agar, 2012; Smith et al., 2015). By using creative non-fiction I was able to maintain the ethical benefits as well as the strengths of creative non-fiction. A strength of creative non-fiction is its ability to “help protect the identity of research participants without stripping away the rawness of real happenings” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 63). The author was able to protect the identities of the participants by sharing their stories through creative non-fiction accounts and the use of pseudonyms. With the fourth creative non-fiction vignette, the three participants’ stories are amalgamated, emphasizing the similarities shared among all three of them.

The second benefit to using creative non-fiction accounts was that they allowed the stories to be told as “deeply embodied, sensorial and relational account[s] of human lives” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 63). Smith and colleagues express this as a vital piece as “bodies are lived, social, and biological entities that shape human conduct” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 63). For this project, the emotions and raw feelings that were shared during the conversational interview process maintained the sensorial accounts.

Third, creative non-fiction has been expressed as a useful method “for bearing witness in that a story can not only offer testimony to a truth but also implicate others by calling on the reader to become a witness of others, that is, to share the story with others” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 63). With the use of creative non-fiction accounts I hope that these stories will be heard by others and viewed as accounts where others can learn from. Viewing these stories will share knowledge about the leading competitor master runner and how these individuals were able to manage their athletic identity over time to allow themselves to live a balanced life while remaining competitive.

## **Portrait Vignettes**

Instead of following the commonly practiced method of sharing results by using verbatim extracts from the conversational interviews, I shared the results through the use of three portrait vignettes and a fourth vignette that was written as an amalgamation among all three participations to further express the similarities. The fourth vignette is to be read as a single, synthesized account, where the story is being told by one singular voice (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). Each of the vignettes was written by using the results of a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis results were organized into a skeleton outline, where themes and sub-themes were highlighted. My supervisor and I discussed the themes and sub-themes and made necessary changes until they were able to assist in answering the overall research question. Following the development of the themes and sub-themes, I used the data collected to pick out direct quotes, ideas, and phrases that would help to tell the parts of the stories that were expressed throughout the vignette and further expanded on in the discussion. Portrait vignettes were chosen as the method of disseminating the thematic analysis results due to three reasons: they are accessible to the reader and the participants and their level of trustworthiness (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, & Pheasant, 2011; Spalding & Phillips, 2007). Portrait vignettes are “illustrative and easy to read, therefore making the research accessible to readers” (Spalding & Phillips, 2007, p. 955). Finally, portrait vignettes incorporate direct quotes from the participants, therefore maintaining a level of trustworthiness, that what was expressed during the interview is what was expressed in the vignette (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). For this research project, pseudonyms were used to personalize the results while maintaining anonymity.

## **Setting the Stage: Paul**

The pseudonym Paul has been chosen to represent this athlete. Sitting down with a person to engage in a conversation about something you are both passionate about is an eye-opening experience. Paul and I were able to meet up to discuss his life as a runner, right from the beginning. I introduced myself and my project to Paul and explained why he was asked to have a role within this project. Right away, Paul and I engaged in a friendly conversation about running. He was excited to share stories with me and I was excited to hear about his experiences with running and how they have been affected by his life and how his life has been influenced by his running journey. After a friendly chat, I further explained my project to him. I shared the reason why I was engaging with this work and expressed my passion towards it and I gave him the opportunity to ask any questions that he might have had. From there, I asked him to share with me his life as a runner, right from the beginning to where he currently is; although this happened between two separate interviews.

Paul was very eager to share his artifacts with me. Including artefacts proved its importance when he was able to share vivid stories that involved the artefacts and further explained why they were so important to him. The first artefact that he brought in was two race bibs, one bib was from one of his most disappointing races and the other from one of the races that he was most proud of. (Figure 3) Encouraging the participant to bring in artefacts helped him to facilitate the discussion because the artefact was able to help to bring the athlete back to the time and place of the story. It was almost as if he was able to relive that moment and share the raw experience with me. Through the discussion of the two race bibs, I, as the researcher, was able to relive those two events with the athlete and feel those raw emotions. The second artefact Paul brought in was an advertising poster of a race in which he fulfills a volunteer role

(Figure 3.1). This artefact was used to bring a different identity of the participant to life; he used it to explain that what he experienced within his running story was much more than just the routine of training and racing.

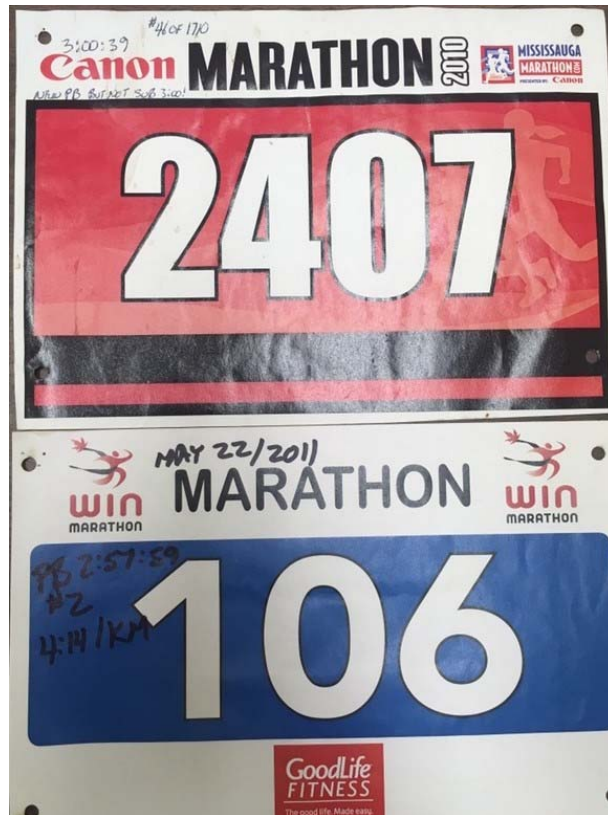


Figure 3. Paul's artefact from interview one – bibs: worst race, best race

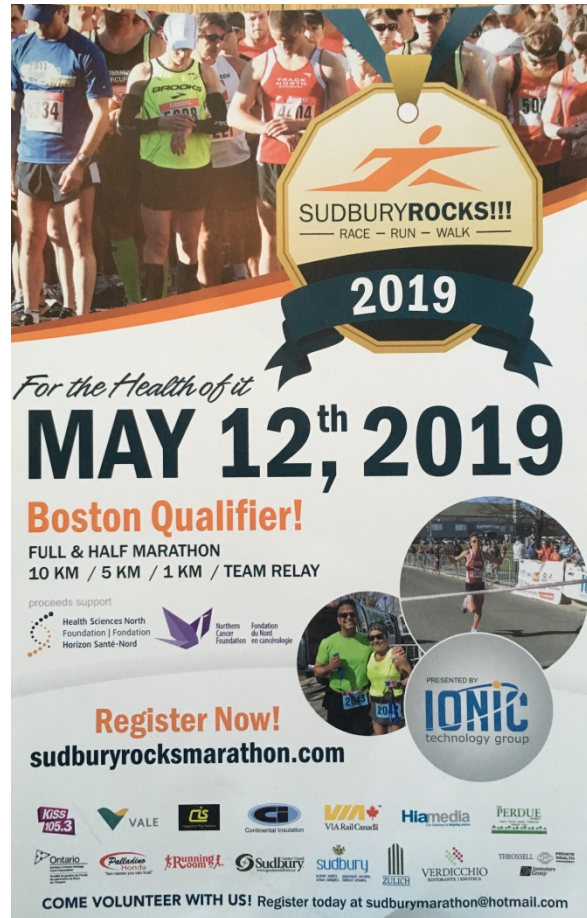


Figure 3.1. Paul's artefact from interview 2 – race poster

## Results

### **Adversity: The 3 hour barrier.**

I ran the Mississauga Marathon. I went into this marathon with the goal of trying to break three hours. Anyone who knows running is aware of this gold standard. I gave this marathon all I had, I crossed the finish line and the clock read 3:00:39... and that was a tough pill to swallow.

My Mississauga marathon might have been a new PB but it was 3 hours and 39 seconds, I hadn't run fast enough. I can remember being very upset with that 'cause it was like the throttle was all the way open and I just knew that it was going to be tight, but unfortunately it didn't happen.

Adversity and failure are some of our strongest motivators to try harder and push ourselves, it's when you really want something and you don't get it that you become even more motivated.

That race was actually in the back of my head throughout my training that winter and all the races that I went to, it was something that I thought about constantly, the pure disappointment. In 2011, this all changed and I didn't expect it at all because my training had been going okay, but not stellar, something which would make any runner not feel 100% confident. The Whitby marathon was one of those races where everything came together in a really bizarre way, but in a way that worked! So, I decided I was going to run this marathon and try to break that 3-hour barrier. Once again, that was my goal; I wanted to break that gold standard. I registered for the race, drove down and got a hotel room for the night. The night before the race I was laying out my stuff, ensuring I was properly prepared and I'm going "okay, so there's my shirt, my socks, my shoes... where's my shorts?!" I realized that I had forgotten my running shorts! It was 10 o'clock at night and the race was in the morning! I thought "how the heck did you forget your running shorts?! Are you f-ing kidding me?! You forgot your running shorts!" I was frustrated with myself, this wasn't my first race, I shouldn't have forgotten anything! I had to think quickly, I had to come up with a plan that would allow me to race. Then I thought "I don't care, if I have to, what I'm going to do is I'm going to take some casual shorts that I have, like khakis, and I'm going to cut them and then wear friggen Vaseline and I'm going to run this race! The fact that I hadn't packed all my gear for this race was not going to be the thing that stopped me from achieving my goal, I was determined. The next morning, I went down to the lobby and I was talking to the race organizer and I said "look, this is going to sound really stupid, but I forgot my shorts, do you know of a store where I can go buy some?" Although it was last minute, I had to figure something out! Out of nowhere the guy beside me goes "hey! We're about the same size! And I got some shorts that would fit you and on top of that, I just washed them, they are clean!" All I was thinking was "you had me at shorts!" I didn't care if they were clean! So, I got

a pair of shorts from this guy, I was going to race in borrowed shorts. I got dressed, ready to race this marathon, my goal in the front of my mind – sub 3-hour marathon. I went to the start line, I was ready to go and just before the gun went off the announcer goes “so we have got a 5k, 10k, half and a full marathon, and we’re going to have a lead cyclist for all race distances” and I thought “okay, no big deal”. After all this was pretty standard for a larger race such as this one. The gun went off and I settled into my pace, a 3-hour marathon is 4:16 per k for 42.2k, so I was just trying to knock those 4:16s off. I knew what I had to do and I knew I had to stay focused in order to do it. I was running beside a woman who was in the 10k race and as we were running a lead cyclist swings out in front of us and I thought “oh cool! This woman is leading the 10k!” I knew I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing. We eventually came to the point where she had to turn off because her race is over and this lead cyclist is still in front of me. I was confused, I was thinking “what the heck is with that guy, why is he in front of me?” because I thought he was the 10k race lead cyclist! At that point, the marathon race course had doubled back on itself and I could see that I was ahead of the 1:30 half marathon pace bunny. I saw all kinds of guys running with the 1:30 pace bunny, with my goal of running a sub 3-hour marathon, the 1:30 half marathon pace bunny would have been a good spot for me. It didn’t take me long to realize that I was leading the race! The first thought through my head was “get out! Who forgot to tell the Kenyans?!” then the reality of it hit me “shit, if I’m leading this race that means that this is my race to lose”. That put a lot of pressure on me. At that point I went “okay, don’t panic, run a smart race, you know how to read your heart rate monitor and you know how to go to exactly the right heart rate zone and stay there, you know how to hydrate, you know how to take the nutrition, just run a smart race, don’t lose your concentration”. In a marathon race you might think you have time to goof off because the race is so long – but you don’t! Every second of that

race I was focusing on everything that was going on around me, you know, am I approaching the hill? What's my heart rate? What's my pace? For me, I have to stay on task the whole time, if I slip out of that then my pace will slide and I might lost 10 or 15 seconds, and that's what happened the year before when I ran a 3:00:39. I was determined to stay on task, I wasn't going to let myself get distracted, breaking 3-hours was achievable and I was ready to do whatever I had to, to ensure that I would be successful. I went through the half marathon feeling nice and strong and I was still leading the race. In the second half of the course, there were three spots where the course doubled back on itself. Every time the course doubled back, I could see that there was one less runner with the small pack that was right behind me. The last time that the course doubled back on itself I saw that there was only one guy left, all the rest of the runners must have fallen back. I felt pressure by this guy behind me, he was fit. I looked down at my heart rate monitor and I was right on the edge of my red zone. I was pushing my limits the lead cyclist who was still beside me goes "hey, there's a guy, he's only about 30 feet behind you and he's caught up with you, you can do one of two things, you can slow down, catch your breath and get ready for the burst when he goes by you or you can lay a charge in right now and try and break him". I'm thinking "I'm right on the edge of my friggen red zone!! There's no way I can do that!" I was already pushing myself, my heart rate was already so high, I don't know how the lead cyclist thought I could push it further to lay a charge on the guy behind me! I had to decide, I had to be in control of what I was going to do. So, then I slowed down a bit just to kind of catch my breath and when this guy went by me, it was like "okay man, let's go!" and I laid a charge right there beside him. We ran probably about a k at 3:30 pace and the whole time I was thinking "die you bastard! Die you f-ing bastard! I'm not giving up! You give up you bastard!" I couldn't believe that this guy was running neck and neck with me! I never gave up the whole time, the



rest of the race I was pushing myself to my limits! I crossed the finish line, looked at the clock and it read 2:57! I couldn't believe it, I had broken the gold standard for the marathon, I had actually run 42.2k in less than 3 hours! I must give that guy credit though; I would not have run a sub 3-hour marathon without him. I did come second; he did hold me off but, by less than a minute! I was very happy with that race! That race just kind of came together even though when I arrived at my hotel room the night before I was not prepared. I realized that I'll never be able to do that again, that was a once in a lifetime race for me and that is the story of my 2:57 marathon. As soon as I got home, I had to call my family to tell them! I was proud of myself and I knew they would be too! I also had to tell one of my friends who didn't think I would be able to run a sub 3-hour marathon! It was incredible.

### **The early years with no formal running.**

My life as a runner... well to be perfectly honest with you, I had no formal running growing up, just like a little bit of running through high school and that was it. I can remember having to run a mile when I was in high school and I was thinking "oh man, this is just crazy! Why do people run?" I totally hated it, it wasn't fun at all and I never considered myself to be a runner at all. However, I was a guy that liked to mountain bike and I got into white water paddling and that was actually something that I got addicted to for many years. You actually get high on your own adrenaline and your own adrenaline is actually a drug, believe it or not, and you tend to crave it. I was addicted to my adrenaline. I also used to go to the gym to build more upper body strength, to become stronger to help me with my paddling. I used to go 3 – 4 times a week and I was the kind of guy that could bench press 200lbs pretty easily, but I couldn't run a mile. I was focused and I was strong, not fast. Things began to change when I had my kids and through experiences with work, but what initially got me into running was the cardiovascular

fitness, primarily, but also to try and keep up with my kids at the time. Just after the age of 36, I went for a job interview and a part of this interview was physical testing. I was strong and I knew that. Over the course of very simple testing, where they had me going up and down stairs, the woman cut off the exercise quite early on and she goes “you don’t have very good cardio fitness”, I was quite surprised by that. I had great physical strength, but my cardio was very pathetic. I kind of scoffed at the time, I didn’t take that comment very well and thought “what is this woman talking about; she doesn’t know what she is talking about!”. It’s almost like I was offended! Fast forward a couple of months and one day I thought “maybe I should go and try to run on the track a little bit, just for the sake of it”. I thought I would try and run a mile on the track indoors and I couldn’t do it! Yeah! It really was disheartening that I couldn’t run a mile cause at that time I was 36 and I thought “I should be able to run a mile! It should be a piece of cake!” but I simply couldn’t. I was a fairly determined person. So, a couple days later I went back and I tried to run again and at that point there were a number of runners that were also on the track and they belonged to a local running group. It was one of their easy days, they were at the end of their run and they were just running slowly. They happened to be just ahead of me and I thought “well, I’ll just slow down and I’ll follow their pace”. That way I was running at a speed that I could hopefully maintain. I was actually able to run a mile and I thought that was such a huge accomplishment, I was proud! A couple days later, after I had completed my workout, I tried to run again and I was able to run even further, I think I got to a mile and a half. Just after such little running, I was already seeing some pretty incredible improvements with what I was able to do! Again, the local running group was on the track and this was a great opportunity for me. When they stopped running I also stopped and said “hey! I hope you don’t mind I was just following your pace and kind of using you guys as pace bunnies” and they were all too friendly

and they said “no! By all means come join us anytime you want! And I said “yeah, maybe I will do that!” Just like that I started running with them sporadically. It was this group that initially got me hooked into running. I really enjoyed the social aspect, the challenges and the rewards of running. I was 36 at the time and when you’re 36 you build muscle quite quickly so I found that I was getting really great gains! I went from somebody that never ran at all and had very poor cardiovascular fitness and instantly I was finding that I was getting much stronger and quicker. I was seeing really significant gains. The whole problem was that although my muscles were responding quite quickly, it is all the other running infrastructure below that doesn’t respond as quickly and I was going well over the 10% rule! Which is - don’t exceed your previous week’s mileage by more than 10%. It was a recipe for a disaster. I was excited about running and just wanted to keep going, but I quickly got injured, and it was actually quite disheartening because I went from a guy that wasn’t a runner at all to someone who was getting faster, stronger, and I was hitting my goals, but then I was absolutely sidelined with this foot injury. I had stretched the ligaments across the bottom of my foot. I was in denial that I was injured, I tried to work through it, to keep running and I was really stupid about it. It was about a week or two until it was like “oh, this is really bad!” and it was going from bad to worse! It just took me a while to realize that I needed time for my foot to heal and it also took me finding a good physiotherapist that diagnosed what was happening in my foot. With the combination of tape, new shoes, new orthotics, water jogging, getting on the bike, and time to heal I was able to very slowly get back to running, but the recovery process took a long time! I almost went through a sense of depression when I couldn’t run, it was really bad, running was something I learned to love very quickly and now I wasn’t able to do it. I always had it in my head that I was going to run again, in a way it was the light at the end of the tunnel. It was actually a friend of mine that helped me

to run again at a pace that was much slower than I was used to, but this prevented me from pushing it to the point where I was going to injure myself. It was running slowly and cautiously with this friend that helped me with the recovery process. But it actually took a long time for me to get back to the point where I could train really hard. This particular friend ended up moving away and it was once she moved away that I was able to kind of go back and run with the local running group. It was around this time that the Garmin GPS watch first came out. These watches were huge, nothing like they are now - slick and small. They also didn't have an optical heart rate sensor like they do now, but they had a cable you could link the data back to your computer and you could upload your data. This was a really neat thing! I remember when the first GPS unit came out that had a heart rate monitor I was like "oh! I gotta get one!" and again, the unit was huge, but it had a wireless heart rate strap for your chest. My training got much more serious when I started training with the heart rate monitor. It became much more serious because I was able to look at my performance relative to my heart rate and what I could sustain over any race distance. I was one of the first guys to get a heart rate monitor, and I was 40 at the time. What I found was that the chest strap was the most accurate way of measuring your heart rate. To this day, if I am actually running a race, I don't use my optical heart rate monitor; I still put my chest strap on. The thing about those devices is that if you spend 3-400 bucks on something like that, you know, you're motivated to use the technology, because you have invested a lot of coin into it. The knowledge you can get from one of these devices is incredibly helpful in the training process. Once you figure out what kind of heart rate you can sustain over any given distance, you have the key to success. At this time, when I was most fit, I could go to 180bpm over the course of a half marathon race distance. I would check my watch to ensure I was maintaining the proper

heart rate for that distance. The instant feedback was a game changer when it came to my training, this is how I was able to become much more serious.

**Serious training, competitive attitude.**

Over time I tried to be somewhat serious in my training. Typically, Tuesdays were either repeat intervals or hill repeats, Wednesdays were more of a recovery day, so I wasn't pushing the pace, Thursdays I tried to do a tempo run, so 40 minutes at 10k race pace effort with the whole idea being that it is in fact race pace. Fridays would be a recovery run, Saturdays were long, slow distance and Sundays would be off. This kind of training plan worked for me! When I raced my first marathon I actually qualified for the Boston Marathon, I ran a 3:08 and I was pretty happy with that. Then I went on to run some other marathons and they actually came out slower, yeah, 3:11. That's the thing with running, not every race is going to be faster than the previous one. The next year I decided that I would go with the local running group and run the Boston Marathon. So, we did that, that's the social aspect that I enjoy about running. During this time, over various race distances such as the half marathon, 30k, and marathon, my times were improving. I eventually was able to run a 3:04 in the Hamilton marathon and then at that point I started to think that I might be able to hit a sub 3-hour marathon, once again the gold standard. Running is interesting because each race course and each distance is very different from one another. In 2010 the best 30k that I had raced was a 2:02 which turned out to be 4:06 each km for 30k, I was pretty happy with that! I remember thinking "yeah, I can hold 4 minutes a k on the flat" but it was the hills that just kind of killed me. It was after a few races that I was able to go and break my goal of a sub 3-hour marathon. And that kind of brings me to where I am, which is I hate to say it, but I haven't run a marathon since, but I've been running all kinds of halves, 30ks, and other local races.

Running is a journey. Over the years of running, my running efficiency has improved significantly. Just over the course of reading a couple of books and watching some YouTube videos on running techniques, I was able to make some changes in the way I ran. I would focus a lot on the momentum that I was creating while running, focusing on making myself go forward instead of running with a bounce, which would have been incredibly inefficient. This information that I have learned has allowed me to be less prone to injury, just by changing how efficiently I run. Another thing that I would focus on was to ensure I was forefoot striking and not heel striking, therefore not being as hard on my joints. Since I have modified my running technique I haven't had any stress fractures or ankle injuries or anything so, yeah that has kind of worked out for me. More recently, I did suffer an injury, but that was due to poor footing in the fall.

### **The steady decline.**

When I was 50 I had a plantar fasciitis issue that took me out of commission for a while. I was running in the fall and there was a really sharp shard of ice and it hit the worst spot underneath the right arch of my foot. It was the exact worst spot, and I don't know if I tore it or if I aggravated the nerve or if it was a combination of the two, but that took a long time to recover from. What I ended up doing was taking up swimming, water jogging, and a lot of stationary biking, and during the winter months I was cross country skiing a lot. I found that I could actually get on my cross country skis and I could skate ski and it wouldn't aggravate my plantar fasciitis. I was still trying to maintain my cardiovascular fitness because I knew I wanted to run again. I was also still trying to meet the guys for Saturday morning breakfast. So, what I would do is, I would be on the stationary bike at my house while the guys would be out running and then we would meet for breakfast and the social aspect. I enjoyed the camaraderie. This worked

out for me and I did it until I was healthy enough to go back out and start running. Once again, I was back to what I loved, running outside, but when running outside, the weather is always something you have to deal with.

As a mature athlete, I'm finding that I am affected by the weather even more than in the past. Now, it's actually harder to train at a higher level in the heat, I do well in cooler temperatures, but when the temperature goes above 25 – 26 degrees I go "okay, it's a survival run today". I do survival runs because I currently run at noon which is the hottest part of the day and you have the sun beating down on you. I've had a lot of runs that were just survival runs because it was so hot. There was one race where I was really affected by the weather, it was just so hot that day. On race morning it was 28 degrees celsius at 6 o'clock in the morning and I sweat like crazy so, even though I was taking in sport drink, I flushed out all my salt and all my fluids and I got dehydrated. I ended up somewhat bonking in the race 'cause I was trying to hold close to 4 minute k's which if I was properly trained I would be able to do, but I wasn't trained and it just was so hot, it just went badly. When I finished the race, my stomach was a mess; I ended up being able to drink a little bit, but not too much. Then, I got called up on the stage because I won my age category, thankfully. Even though I had a brutal race, it was still good enough to win my age category. I was standing up there and I started thinking "not only is my stomach a mess, but I think I'm going to pass out", right in front of everyone. I ended up buckling over just a little bit so I could get some blood into my head and then I popped up to get my picture taken. I went back to my seat and that is where things got even worse. I asked my friends who were sitting with me if they could get the paramedics, they did and I ended up lying down in the back of the ambulance for a while until I felt a little bit better. That was my half marathon experience this year. So, you get older, not necessarily wiser and sometimes it's hard

to just not push as hard as you could when you were younger. You wish you were still 18 or whatever and as strong as you were, but you're not, you just gotta come to terms with that and that's the hardest part about being an older runner. The way I look at it now is that "yeah, I'm not going to win the race, but I'm going to come decently placed and with any luck I'll win my age category".

I am very fortunate with where I am with my current job and my running schedule. In the basement of the building where I work there is a change room, that makes it convenient for me to run straight from work. I don't have to go to the YMCA or go to Laurentian, I just go to the basement, I've got a locker, I've got showers, I can just put my stuff on and I can run. So basically, I can get 9k in quite easily on my lunch and then go back, shower, go back to my desk and then I'll actually eat while I work. I have arranged this with my manager, they are really accommodating. It's this accommodation that has helped me to get to the point where I am now. My noon hour is not spent sitting around, surfing the web, it's getting out and getting some exercise. I have always managed to fit in my run over my lunch hour and this is what every lunch hour looks like, I'm pretty consistent.

Recently I was out running with a guy who was half my age. When we were on the flats, it was not a problem for me to hold, you know, 4:30 pace and chat with this guy but, when we would get to the hills this guy obviously had more power than I. So, what I do in situations like that is I don't attack the hills because I know that if I do, I'm going to pay for it. So, I tend to watch my heart rate and when I come to a hill, I try to not let it get too high. These younger guys can go deeper, much deeper. It's just natural that they are going to be able to charge on the hills more than I can so, that's something that I have to self recognize – don't attack the hills because I'm going to pay for it in the long run. My training has changed slightly with my age. I don't



mind going out and doing a 40-minute tempo run because it is hard for 40 minutes, but I can do it, whereas a hill repeat workout is really hard, you make yourself almost vomit for one minute. I find that one minute more excruciating than the 40 minutes of going out and pushing it.

Although I don't like them as much now, I should be doing more repeats, I just have to find my mojo and kick myself in the butt and go do it, and so, that's how it goes. As part of my training now, I usually train with the group on Saturday mornings it's a social long, slow distance run. Wednesdays are a little bit of a change up – what I will try to do is do a noon yoga session and then run with a different local group in the evening. It's not a terribly challenging run but, it is quite social. After this run we go out for a drink or two – very social. Running with others makes it enjoyable, you just go with whomever shows up on that day. On one of my training runs recently, a guy said to me “you're as smooth as butter when you run! That's why I like running with you” and I thought “oh, well, I'll take that as a compliment!” I'm still putting in a lot of training mileage throughout the week, so I can still show up to races prepared and properly trained.

A few years ago, I was able to run a 1:26 for a half marathon and I was really happy with that, it was better than I expected. In this particular race I was challenged by a few other runners but, I knew I had to do what I was supposed to do and hold my own pace, I had to hold my 4-minute pace. These other guys kept pushing the pace and that is when I started to focus on what I needed to do and I basically said “have at it guys” as they picked it up and I maintained what I needed to do. As time continues to go on, it's just “okay, try not to slip from last year”. To be perfectly honest, I'm not competing against other guys now, in reality, I'm competing with last year's self and not lose too much, that's it in a nutshell. I am just trying to fight the calendar. I'm still pretty competitive at 53, I just feel good about myself and life.

### **The fight against the calendar.**

Okay, so more recently... as you get older, whether you like it or not you have to come to terms with the fact that you're fighting the calendar, so to speak, you're fighting the aging, and you're fighting the fact that your natural muscle structure is going to change. You will still have your slow twitch muscle fibers that will carry you through a lot of long distance races, but you are losing your top end horsepower. The hard part is coming to terms with the fact that I don't have the peak power that I did before, and I don't, I can't go out and push it as hard as I did before whether I like it or not, it's just not there anymore. I have come to terms with the fact that I can't increase my VO2 max, but I can try and maintain whatever VO2 max that I have and try to improve efficiencies in my strides, so those are some of the things I am dealing with as a mature athlete. I think it is hard to maintain the high level of training that I used to do. When I was younger I was more excited about the gains that I was making and I was seeing those gains and admittedly now, as a mature athlete, I'm just trying to hold what I have and yeah, I haven't kept up the really intense stuff. Occasionally, I'll do some repeat intervals but it's not on a regular schedule like I have in the past. I just enjoy the fact that, because of how I invested in my health earlier on, I am still able to do some pretty neat things, like cross country skiing, yoga, and rock climbing. When I look back on the fitness level of my parents when they were this age, there is no way they could have done some of the things that I am doing. There is no way that they could have gone to a yoga session, rock climbing or white-water paddling, so I am really glad that I have been able to maintain my fitness and I think the running is the base exercise that's kept my overall fitness. Running has allowed me to do all of these really neat things in life.

### **The role of an ambassador.**

The way I see myself now is not just as a mature athlete – a master’s athlete, but I also see myself in the role of an ambassador so to speak. I try to help out within the running community because it is this community that has given me so much. Years ago, my two friends talked me into a volunteer position to help out at one of our local races and I said “yeah, I’ll do it” with the whole notion of “well if I go to other cities and do races, I should be giving back to the community”. So, I became involved in this race because I thought it was a good thing to do for the community and at that point it was like “well, it’s either the race is going to shut down due to people stepping down or someone is going to have to step forward”. Within the first couple of years that I was helping out with this race we had expanded it quite a bit, we incorporated different race distances. We also partnered with a bunch of different local companies that would help us put on this race and help us get the word out. I’m a volunteer just like all the other people, I don’t get paid but I volunteer hundreds of hours and go through a lot of stress to help organize this event and hand over all the proceeds to the charities but, this is my way of giving back to the community as a runner. That’s where I see myself; I can still help within the running community. This is a huge part of who I am. One of the things that I didn’t realize I did, but I guess I do whether it is consciously or unconsciously is when I am out running and I see someone else running I’ll chat with them and then I’ll start mentioning the race and I’ll say “hey what are you doing on this day?” without even realizing it “come out and do the race!”. It is default mode for me – I just automatically do it now – just promote the whole notion of running and trying to stay active. I also don’t think I would be a good coach so I’m okay to help organize. The payoff from this event is quite rewarding. Admittedly, where I get payback is when I get the feedback from people and when people say “I love the event!” or I see people

coming across the finish line and they are high fiving their friends and family because this is the first time that they have done an event like this. It's rewarding just to make that opportunity available for people to come out and participate because you know that if you organize something like this, they're maybe going to buy some running shoes, they're maybe going to get more active, maybe overall the community health effects will become marginally better just because we took the time to organize something like this.

## **Discussion**

Paul provided insight into some of the tactics, social relations, and motives that he had used throughout his life in relation to his running story. When interviewed, this participant described the tactics, social relations, and motives at various points within his running journey and expressed how he may or may not have changed over time due to the natural aging process. The portrait vignette representing Paul's story offered a partial answer to the research question: How do leading competitor masters' level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in? The three themes along with their sub-themes will be discussed in relation to the literature: tactics (subthemes: realizing age and athletic ability, process of recovering from injury, technology, and work schedule meeting running schedule); social relations (subthemes: spark of interest in running, positive experience as an active member in the running community, and giving back to the community); motives (subthemes: convenience of running, and fighting the calendar).

## **Tactics**

Paul has outlined the many tactics that he has used over the years to allow himself to keep training and racing at his high capacity. Many tactics were used so the athlete was able to bounce back from adversity, such as dealing with the process of recovering from an injury, or

enhancing his level of training with the use of technology, or the idea of him realizing his age and his athletic ability as it was changing over time or, finally, managing his work schedule along with his running schedule to be able to maintain both. The relation between realizing age and athletic ability and the idea of the ‘new-to-the-sport master runner’ is described as a tactic that encouraged participant one to be realistic and successful while on his athletic pursuit (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015).

**Realizing age and athletic ability.** Paul’s ability to realize his age and his current athletic ability is a tactic that he used throughout the entirety of his running journey. The connection between his age and his athletic ability is something that he would consider and use as guidelines to measure his personal acceptance of his performance at any given age. Paul is best described as a “new-to-the-sport master runner,” a category that was defined by Pfitzinger and Latter (2015). Although Pfitzinger and Latter (2015) had suggested that the cut-off age for a new-to-the-sport master runner was the age of 40 and he started to engage in running at the age of 36, he did not become more serious in his training until he had reached the age of 40. Paul reinforced Pfitzinger and Latter’s (2015) discussion on the new-to-the-sport masters athlete in the sense that his path followed very closer to how they defined this term. His journey supports their main ideas of becoming fit and fast very quickly due to the aerobic base he had gained from previous sport and his ability to apply that physical ability to running. The previous sports that Paul engaged with were white water paddling and going to the gym. Paul had expressed his own motivations as to why he engaged in running at this point in this life and he was in fact “motivated to participate in masters sport for a variety of reasons” (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008, p. 31), reasons such as his overall cardiovascular fitness and his inability to keep up with his children. He gained health benefits from his new training regimen very quickly, and also

recognized and appreciated his new lifestyle as he became fitter and faster very quickly from training week to training week (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). For Paul, realizing his age and his athletic ability was something that enabled him to train to the level that would allow him to be competitive with his age group and with the entirety of the race participants. He began to pay attention to the relationship between his age and his athletic ability very evidently at two various points in his life: once at the beginning of his running journey, when at the age of 36 he could not believe that he was only 36 years old and yet he was not able to run a mile and, again, later in life, when he reached the 50 year milestone and had come to realize that he had slowed down and was no longer trying to get PBs, but switched his focus to holding onto as much of his physical abilities that he had in the previous year. He switched his focus to maintaining his past physical abilities and even accepting slight increases in total race times.

**Process of recovering from injury.** Returning to run from an injury caused by running can be a long process due to the repeated motions of running. Paul was faced with a number of injuries throughout his running journey. He expressed his first injury was caused by the fact he was increasing his mileage well over the 10% rule, which is to not increase your mileage over the course of week by more than 10% of what you ran the week before. Paul expressed that he was sidelined with a foot injury and with that injury he initially tried to train through it and hoped that it would get better. He soon realized that he needed to take the time to allow his foot to heal. He had assistance when it came to the healing process - he had found a physiotherapist and engaged in alternate training until he was able to start running again at a slow and cautious pace. The process of returning to run from an injury plays into the individuals' athletic identity, especially with the level of competence that they receive from the sport. Recognizing the fact that as an athlete you have to take time away from your sport to heal from an injury is not an

ideal situation, but Paul had a high level of competence in his sport and was able to make the decision to take time away from running with the help of a medical professional. His “competence appear[ed] to be necessary for [him] to take pride in and identify with the ability to struggle and persist” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 201) when faced with an injury. Although at the time of this injury he was still fairly new to the sport of long distance running, he had quickly developed a strong athletic identity which, in turn, made him experience a sense of depression when he had to take time off from running. There are two ways a strong athletic identity can affect an athlete; either in a positive or negative way. In this case, the strong athletic identity may have had a negative role with how he dealt with this injury. He was very committed to running and that sole fact may have had the potential to lead him down a path where he was met with an injury. He also tried to continue to run with an injury due to the fact he was enjoying the gains and the positive experiences he was receiving due to running. Paul’s description of injuries that he faced over the course of his running journey highlighted his ability to persist and push through adversity. This reinforced Kleiber and Kirshnit’s (1991) study, where the means to struggle and persist were critical when an individual is reinforcing a chosen identity.

**Technology.** Paul expresses his use of technology throughout his running journey. He purchased a GPS watch just four short years after starting his running journey and, along with this purchase, his training became much more serious. He was now able to monitor and track his physical performances over the course of training runs and race performances. Paul continues to demonstrate the healthy use of GPS and heart rate monitor technology on his runs. He uses the heart rate monitor to ensure he is in fact pushing himself to the point that will lead him to an ideal performance, meaning he is not running at a pace that is too quick or running at a pace that is too slow for his physical capabilities (Sailors, 2009). Paul’s use of a GPS watch and heart rate

monitor is used to a degree at which he experiences performing enhancing qualities; his watch and heart rate monitor are not distractions to his training and performances, but rather an asset. He has finely tuned the use of this technology to the point throughout a run where it is most beneficial to be aware of his running information, mainly his heart rate. He ensures he monitors his heart rate when approaching and running on an incline, to ensure he is not pushing his pace to the point where he is running on borrowed time; here he uses his watch to ensure he remains in control over his race or over his training run. This technology allows him to firmly identify with his athletic identity, as he receives data that reinforce his running experiences; this has been true for Paul since he purchased his GPS watch and heart rate monitor and continues to be true as he ages.

**Work schedule meets running schedule.** Human beings grow up and follow a life course. Each individual's life course may have similarities to someone else's or it may be drastically different. People have different obligations that come and go within their life as they go through their life course; such as careers, career changes, family obligations, etc. These "older adults [have often] faced several turning points and transitions in their lives that either impeded or enhanced their level of involvement in physical activity" (Scanlon & Mogel & Roberto, 2004, p. 42). Paul's work schedule and his running schedule fit together seamlessly; this is due to the fact that his boss is extremely accommodating and allows him to arrange his day in a way that would allow him the time to get his work done as well as to run during the work day hours. Paul and his boss have arranged for him to run on his lunch hour where he could come back, shower up, and get back to work, where he is then able to eat while working. In order for long-distance runners to race at their maximum potential at any age, they must have the ability (e.g., time must allow) to train properly and to train enough mileage. It is due to this accommodation that he is



able to put in the amount of training needed to perform confidently at his races. Paul's description of his running and career schedule supports Scanlon-Mogel and Roberto's (2004) study when they investigated older adults and the turning points in their lives that either enhance or impede their athletic journeys.

### **Social Relations**

Paul's social relations were broken down into three sub-themes: a spark of interest in running, positive experiences as an active member in the running community, and giving back to the community. As long-distance running is both an individual and team sport, social relations seem to present themselves as the driving factor for some of the things that occur throughout the lifetime of a runner. For Paul, social relations with more experienced runners played a large role in his interest in running, as it was a local group that accepted him and encouraged him to come out and run with them. Paul also expressed many positive experiences that he had as an active member in the running community; these positive experiences were also due to other people who were closely tied to the running community. Finally, his desire to give back to the community was driven by various social relations and experiences that he had with other people in the running community over the course of his running journey. He was inspired by the fact that he travels to race in other cities; he felt the desire to give back to his local running community.

**Spark of interest in running.** Long distance running is a unique sport due to the fact that it has the capabilities to be both individualized and presented as a team sport equally. When Paul started to run, social relations between him and a local running group was the catalyst to his initial engagement and eventually what kept him returning to the sport of long distance running. Paul's identity formation and management journeys supported the literature by providing an example of when his identities were produced and how they were shaped and resisted; such as

the lack of an athletic identity was not an option in Paul's story. His new running identity was an example of how "identities are produced, shaped, taken-up or resisted" (Cosh et al., 2013, p. 90). Paul's athletic identity was supported by the social setting of others who were engaging in the same activity at this time. This specific identity is being reinforced, further produced, and taken-up more closely by the individual. Due to the fact that he was surrounded by a local running team that was made up of people who were likeminded, his athletic identity and more specifically his running identity was able to be taken-up and explored right from the start of his engagement with running. The social aspect of running played a huge part in his ability to integrate himself into a running schedule and know that he had the support of other experienced runners. Now-a-days, it is the continued social connections that are still proving to be an asset in his running journey, as these social relations are still a driving factor for his sport participation.

**Positive experiences as an active member in the running community.** Paul expressed many positive experiences with running; such as good race times, breaking goals but, more importantly he expressed positive experiences with people whom he met along the way. Many of these people were more experienced and well-integrated into the running community than he, so they were able to offer him advice. These people inspired him to engage in running and to not give up. Paul is classified as an "insider" within the long distance running social world (Shipway et al., 2012, p. 263). He is classified as an "insider" due to the fact that he is part of a running club and social groups that shared the same interest in long distance running and he is also well aware of and understands how to navigate the rules and rituals of being an "insider" in this social context (Shipway et al., 2012). Smith (1998) had recognized distinctions between the terms 'jogger', 'runner', and 'athlete'; runners who are considered to be insiders within the running community more closely related to the term 'athlete'. The term 'athlete' is used to describe "elite

performers or athletes [who] comprise a very small portion of the field in most road races” (Smith, 1998, p. 197) and they also “experienced a high level of intensity of the competition... that they were all acutely aware of just who their major rivals were” (Smith, 1998, p. 179). This social relation of positive experiences as an active member in the running community has presented itself in Paul’s life in many inspiring ways. He had expressed a situation where one of his friends had been by his side throughout the duration of his injury recovery process. He shared that she was there supporting him by running at a slower, more cautious pace to ensure that he would be able to return to running in a healthy way. Paul also expressed situations where he would travel with his running friends to various races. These times where he described social support helped him to reinforce his athletic identity. Paul’s description of his experience reinforced the running hierarchy, as he knew he was an insider, this was something that helped to build his athletic identity and positively reinforced it throughout his running journey. The ‘insider’ category in the running hierarchy proved to be something valued by the members of this category as it was something they worked hard to be a part of.

**Giving back to the community.** A stereotype that is upheld within society is that the aging population should not be competing in sport, although this stereotype is restricting, society has formed another very restricting stereotype for the aging population (Baker et al., 2010). This additional stereotype is that the aging population, when competing in sport, is not able to give back to the community, but in fact they are a burden to the community due to their increased needs (Baker et al., 2010). Paul’s running journey is an example of a story that differs from the literature, in the sense that Paul was able to give back to the community and he was not acting or perceived by others as a burden, he was offering his expertise wherever possible, in a conscious effort to give back to the community as a whole. Paul has been able to give back to the

community in a way that is most meaningful to him. Stepping away from the medical point of view that western society has placed on the aging population, Paul has been giving back to the community by acting as an advocate. He is a volunteer at one of the local races; he has taken on a large role, a role that is necessary for the race to happen each year. Along with this huge volunteer position that he fills, he has taken it a step further and now identifies as an advocate for the running community as well. He advocates for a healthy lifestyle and spreads the word about running as a great way to ensure others are in fact living a healthy lifestyle. This mindset has been influenced with the whole notion that if he is going to other cities to compete in races, he should be giving back to his community in a meaningful way.

### **Motives**

Research on motives is “valuable because it provide[s] the basis for understanding the choice, effort, and persistence tendencies” (Medic, 2010, p. 105) of athletes. Paul provided insight into the motives that he used over the years, enabling him to continue his high level of running. Although ‘convenience of running’ and ‘fight the calendar’ are similar sub-themes for each participant in this study, the way the individual athletes have expressed how they have used them throughout their journey are different. Paul provided insight into the convenience of running by integrating his journey with his career path and family obligations, as they were the primary obligations in his life at one time. Paul also provided insight into how he manages the interaction and negotiation of the many different dimensions of the positive, negative, and fluid aging narrative (Dionigi, 2006b). This allows him to participate competitively in running with limited negative aspects.

**Convenience of running.** On numerous occasions Paul expressed the idea that running is a convenient activity; an activity that you can just put your shoes on, get out the door and do.

You don't have to go to a facility; just going outside was sufficient. Paul found running to be convenient when considering his work schedule as well as when considering his family life. Paul is a father. He labeled himself within a family dynamic (Epp & Price, 2008) and then associated with that identity to a certain degree. Due to his family arrangements he expressed that he had always been able to negotiate his Saturdays in order to get his long, slow distance run in and during the week and he didn't need to negotiate his training time with family because he had made those arrangements with his boss at work. Therefore he was able to train with the least amount of family and work friction (Dionigi et al., 2012). The convenience of running is something that is still being described by Paul; from the beginning of his journey to the present day the ease of running has been a main motive for the continuation of his training and racing. Paul's running journey was an example of how it is possible to fulfil multiple identities and experience different identities over time; this supported Dionigi et al. (2012) in the sense that they found sport participation to be possible when integrated into the lifestyle with minimal family and work frictions.

### **Fight the calendar.**

Older people who compete in sport are automatically seen to be resisting the dominant negative stereotypes associated with aging and feeling empowered to live a fulfilled and healthy life. Alternatively, one could argue that older athletes are taking up the positive aging discourse and have the potential to express undesirability or denial of the inevitability of old age in their attempt to resist the aging body... This participation may represent a simultaneous interaction and negotiation of all these dimensions. (Dionigi, 2006b, p. 184)

Paul's running story reinforces the Dionigi's (2006b) discussion around the two sides of the aging narrative. Paul has expressed both sides of the aging stereotypes. He has expressed the fact that he is actively fighting the aging process and the fact that he is up against the calendar; this is something that was expressed in the present years of his life and not something that he was conscious of in his younger years while running. It is the combination of trying to mitigate the physical effects of aging along with the realization that aging is natural and he is going to have to navigate age related declines in his physical abilities. That allowed for Paul to balance his desire to fight the calendar and to still maintain a training regimen that is allowing him to compete and be competitive within his age group. Paul found the balance of these aging stereotypes that works for him and further strengthens his athletic identity and the competitive nature of his sport participation. Fighting the aging process and fighting the calendar are motives to his adherence to his training regimen, accepting the age-related physical decline was necessary for him to be able to compete within his age group, while remaining positive and physically fit.

### **Setting the Stage: David**

The pseudonym David has been chosen to represent this athlete. "Hey! Sorry I missed your call; I was actually downstairs on my bike! I had to finish my workout this morning!" I had made initial contact with David over the phone; I had called him to see if he was interested in being a part of my project as it was felt that he would be a great person with the experience we were looking for. On the phone, it was evident that David had a lifetime worth of experience with running and he was more than comfortable sharing his stories, and not only was he comfortable he also wanted to share his stories, especially to me, who he thought was similar to a younger version of himself. David walked into our meeting space, he was a shorter man who beamed with confidence and displayed his interest in meeting new people and talking about

running, something that he is very passionate about. Meeting with David felt like I was meeting with a long-time friend of mine. Right away, he was telling stories and was eager to share the information that was of interest. He had shown up with a bag in his hands which was full of artefacts, you could tell he had a lot of experiences due to running. When we sat down, he put his bag down and was immediately comfortable talking to me. I introduced myself and my project, sharing with him my passion towards running and why this project was important. He was very interested in it and felt that he had stories to share that would enhance this project. Once I had explained the project and had asked him to share his life with me as a runner, he started talking about his experience from the beginning of his running journey. His personality was unique in the way that he was able to make others feel like they had known him for a long time, even if it was their first-time meeting. David and I were able to get to know each other through a discussion around experiences and people that are familiar to both of us. He had so much information to share, he had a hard time narrowing it down and figuring out a place where he could start to share his story. As he began to share details of his running journey he started to pull artefacts out of his bag. He had brought with him a pair of old running shoes (Figure 4), his collection of race bibs (not pictured), an old singlet that he had worn (Figure 4.1), and two books that he used as guides in his competitive running years (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4. David's artefact from interview 1 – shoes



Figure 4.1. David's artefact from interview 2 – singlet



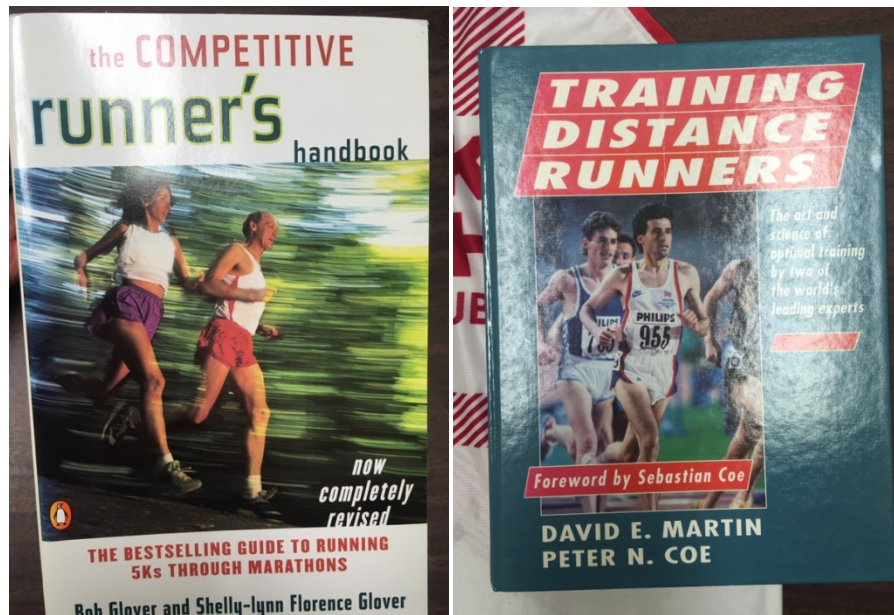


Figure 4.2. David's artefacts from interview 2 – books that were used for guidance

## Results

### **It's who I am: racing flats.**

My life as a runner, eh? Where do I even start! I have always liked running! See these shoes are a piece of memorabilia that I have kept around all this time. The marathons I ran in '81, '82, and '83 all had something in common, I had these shoes, they were New Balance and these guys were made in the US. They came out in 1981 as sort of a racing flat because they are fairly light, compared to some of the clunkers I wore back in the day. When I got them, I thought “oh great!” you know “lighten up a little bit” and I tend to like light weight shoes, I mean there are tradeoffs, cushioning for lighter weight, but you know, they work for me I ran marathons in these nutty things! I had the soles of these shoes re-done. I would send them down to these guys in Kingsville, Ontario and they would re-sole them. Once you wore them out like they are now, he would take off the black and he would laminate new bottoms. I liked light shoes and like I said these were the first that New Balance ever offered and I put a lot of miles on them. I stretched it out a little bit, I would get about 1000k out of my shoes, they say you should retire

them after about 500k or 600k but I'm not, I don't think I'm hard on my shoes, so I would go further! I also didn't do all my training in them, I had other shoes too, and normally I would have two pairs of shoes on the go at any one time, wear one on one day and one the next and so on – to spread the wear out. I would mark all my mileage down on a calendar so when I reached a certain mileage and they were fairly worn I would just arbitrarily retire them, but these ones, I probably put more mileage on them than I should have, ha. These shoes worked for me and that is what I always say, you have to find out what works for you and do it. I also wore short-shorts because that's what I liked, so that's what I did, it's who I am.

### **Running from the start: right, left, right.**

I have always liked running. I did it a little bit in high school although I was a smoker at the time, misspent youth. I liked the individual aspect of it; team sports, I'm a klutz I don't do hockey, basketball, any team sport, forget it. The thing I like about running is it doesn't require any particular skill just bloody determination, one foot in front of the other and go, it's that simple. That's the way I describe it. I like it and you don't need any special facility, you can put your shoes on and get out the door. After high school I went right into an apprenticeship, I'm a trade's guy. It wasn't until 1979 when I was inspired by a local runner – an older guy. I used to go to a local gym after work and lift weights, I called it muscle bending. At this facility they also had an indoor track and I would see that older gentleman running around. He would go up there and he would be hammering out the miles, I was kind of intrigued by all that stuff! Later I heard of people running around the top floor of the local arena, so I started going there and I started leaving the weights behind and concentrate more on running. I used to only run as a warm up before going to the weights, but these guys inspired me. I talked to some of the guys running at the arena and asked them “how far are you running?” “Oh I'm doing 5 miles” “I'm doing 8

miles” “you are?” That’s quite far! But that’s pretty much it, I started in the winter of ’79 and I worked up bit by bit ‘cause I was told by other runners “don’t do too much” you know and they were absolutely right. Next thing you know I was running 8, you know 8k and 10ks and whatnot. A bunch of the locals were going to Ottawa in the spring time to run the marathon and I was interested in this. I asked for advice from one of the local runners and was told “look, don’t worry about speed, if you’re going to want to run your first marathon” which is where my focus was. He said “if you’re going to run your first marathon, just get in the mileage, don’t be concerned about how fast you’re running”, and he was absolutely right.

### **Let’s see how I can improve on that!**

I trained for the Ottawa marathon – my first marathon, I did most of my distance training by myself. The furthest I ever ran in training was 16-17k, my training regimen was six days a week, one day off, all through the way I never ran straight seven days a week, I would always take a rest day somewhere. In the marathon, I ran a decent time, and thought “okay, that’s good” and I was hooked. So I trained for Ottawa again the next year to see what I could do, I put in a little bit more mileage, but I was still on the same six days a week regimen. The next year in a marathon I ran 3:09 and I thought: “hey, we’re cooking here” and now I had that 3-hour barrier staring me down in the face and I was thinking “hmm, how can we improve on that?” I knew I needed to train some more. I went back to run the marathon the next year and ran just under three hours, so “hey, we broke 3, beautiful”, that was a great feeling. Although not every marathon did my time get faster, I had run a 3:05 and that was a disappointment but then subsequent years I brought that down again. During that time, I remember talking to a local dentist; we were talking about running and how to better your time. He said “you know, if you don’t do speed work, you’re just going to become a good slow distance runner” he was right, he also said “you have to

do speed work, you have to change it up” so I did. Within my six day training regimen I did speed work and isolated my long, slow distance that I did on the weekend by making Friday my rest day. I started running with a track group in the early 80’s; therefore I had extra support from a coach. I did a lot of k repeats, since I was more of a distance guy and that was good! On the track it is exact, you’re not guessing how far you need to run, you set your watch. You want to run 40 second 200s well okay away you go I liked the certainty of it, the certainty of the distances on the track. Within this time frame I also had raced and trained with one of my compatriots, he was five years older than I was, but we ran a lot together, we ran similar times, and we did some training together – mostly long runs.

When it came down to the races, the time of year would affect my goals and my expectations for that race. I did the Detroit marathon for a number of years, and it is always the third weekend in October, when the weather was crappy here, you go down there and it’s like you turn the clock back three weeks, it’s around 10 degrees, perfect! I almost consider that 8 – 12 degrees range to be perfect! I would always race regardless of the temperature, but I would just re-adjust my goal time, I mean if it is hot, I’m not going to run as fast. The weather is something you always have to consider. Some of the best times I’ve achieved were in my late 30s and early 40s, as far as times for the half marathon and marathon, they all occurred this late in life. So, I raced competitively up until the early 90s and then I basically had run about 20 marathons and I thought “I’m in my early 40s now, it’s time to just switch gears and back off” because it was a lot of training, I always say, you know, “if you haven’t done the homework, don’t go to the start line, marathons are not something to be taken lightly”. I mean, of course I guess I took it maybe more seriously than others but it’s not a lark, I don’t care who you are. Make sure you get in the bloody mileage, do your homework so you’re confident at the start line. At 39, I ran my fastest

marathon, I ran a 2:46, I ended up being 5<sup>th</sup> in my age category, but that was the fastest that I have ever run. I was happy with that and that was good! I ran a lot of marathons in Detroit. In 1991, I ran my last marathon in Detroit, it was a cooler day, I had a long sleeve shirt underneath and my hands were cold. My hands are cold at the best of times, you'll see me on a cool fall day, short sleeves with gloves on, yeah - I wear gloves. It's something I know that I have to do, it's how I make it work for me. In my early 40s, I remember – we were doing some training out on the roads and I just felt – I didn't do anything but it just felt off... anyways x-rays, MRI and whatnot, yeah, I had a little meniscus tear, so I had it locally repaired. I went through the recovery phase and I went back to running, I was fine! It didn't hold me back for long. I didn't try to run through it either, I went to see my doctor right away, no no no, you can't run through. I knew it didn't feel right, you know, sometimes you get muscle strains and whatnot and I had a little bit of that, I considered myself not an iron man but I've been pretty good as far as injuries go in my younger days. My right knee did go again – it was only 4 – 5 years later.

I was a machinist during my working years, I didn't have family responsibilities, my wife and I didn't have any children. I was working and strictly running. I would go to work in the morning, come home around 4 – 4:30, and out the door, right then before supper, so yeah that was my regular routine. But when you would come home and look at the couch I would think “oh shit, that looks so nice!” but, I didn't. I got dressed, put my stuff on, next thing you know, you are out running an 8k or 15k or whatever and it is generally pretty good, the odd time though, you go out and oh... you start out flat, you think it is going to get better and it doesn't. Sometimes, you're better off just to turn around and go back home, don't fight it, you're pooched, forget it. I've had those days, not that many – more good than bad but there has been some bad, yeah, “I feel like shit” it's just not going – go home. And I don't beat myself up for it,

I'm dedicated enough, it's okay to take a break when your body needs it. Running was part of my day, but I also did a little workout at home, you know, push-ups, crunches, core and weights. I used to come home and do that floor routine and whatnot and then go for a run but, I found it was crowding my run time so I said "when can I fit in this little workout?" "hmm... get up earlier in the morning" so I did. Instead of getting up at 6, I got up at 5:30, did my half an hour routine, shave, shower, go to work, work, come home, run, that's how I did it. I did this because it was important to me, you gotta do the training if you want to compete and yeah, do the homework. My routine slightly changed during the summer months, sometimes when I wanted to get a long run in what I did – when it was hot, you don't want to run after work at 4:30, you want to run when it is a little bit cooler, so I ran early in the morning. So what I would do is, the night before I would drive my car to work with a bike in the trunk, park my car in the parking lot, and then bike back home. The next morning – of course we had shower facilities at work and work clothes and all that stuff - I would get up early in the morning and I would leave the house at about 6 and I would run to work. It would take me, yeah 16k it would take me about an hour, a little over an hour, I would run there, get there, go in shower up, put my work clothes on, work, and then after work, my workout was in. It was like 30 degrees outside during the day – it was summer a hot summer day, you know. I worked in an industrial environment – I carried a lunch pail – some people thought I was nuts – you know, some of my compatriots would say "there's that weirdo running to work again". The running was important to me, so I did it, it didn't matter what other people thought. At work the showers were a big group shower – of men, of course and you see everybody. Everybody who was my age, they were the typical 40 year old type male with the beer gut and I didn't want to be like that. I ran not just to look good but to feel good too – I mean I feel good, you know and I could carry on normally.

In 1999, my mother passed away weeks before the Ottawa half marathon, that was a half marathon that I had been training for. She had a major stroke, 73 years old, boom – anyways she spent a week in hospital and she died and this race was coming up and like I said I had been training for it, so I thought “let’s go to Ottawa”. So my wife and I went to Ottawa, I ran a 1:18; I smoked it – boy that was a good run! I just hammered the snot out of it! It feels good when you are able to have a race like that!

**Don’t get sucked in: My running bible.**

Something I reflect on is this book, it’s called The Competitive Runner’s Handbook and I used it for some guidance along with some support from a coach. This book was one of my bibles when I was running, not just from over the age of 50, but all throughout, something that has remained consistent over all the years. I had purchased it soon after I started running it was very approachable and I used it a lot. The book really helped me ensure I followed a running plan that was going to work for me, it was a good reading, taught me much of what I know about running. Something that really helped me was learning that sometimes you have to hold back and not get sucked in to the pace of other racers. Run your pace, know your pace, run your pace, it’s all individual.

**Over 50: Fairly fast and fairly competitive.**

Running over 50 I still felt fairly fast for my age and fairly competitive, especially that one race in Arizona, that one really stands out for me. When I ran in 2002, I was 51 years old and I ran a 1:18 and change, I was very happy about that one! Although I ended up coming second in my age category by 30 seconds but, you don’t know the competition so you know – that’s the way it goes. Subsequent to that when I was 55 I ran Detroit and I guess I had “slowed down” a

bit already, if you will. I ran a 1:24, but I still captured my age category and it went well, I was happy about that.

**The straw that broke the camel's back: The decline.**

After 55, I started having more “physical issues” specifically in 2007, it’s not running related, but I went to pick up my dog – properly, with a proper lifting technique and something snapped – it was the straw that broke the camel’s back so to speak. I stayed in the hospital overnight, they took an x-ray and I had a bulging disk on the nerve, needless to say, my running took a bit of a hit at that point in time. I could not physically stand upright and I was not able to run, oh God, for 4 - 5 months. I mean I eventually started walking again and eventually started running again, but it took a long time to come around, but since then – touch wood- no back issues. Once you get up in age – you know wear and tear and so forth and that was in my late 50s. I started coming back, but then I wasn’t looking to run long distances really, not even half marathons, now if I’m going to run anything it will be a 5k or a 10k – that’s it! I’ve done everything I wanted to, so as far as times go and whatnot, I have got nothing left to prove – I certainly don’t want to run any more marathons, there’s a lot of training that goes into it. Where I am right now is basically – I’m at a sort of maintenance level if you will. Before when I was training seriously in my 30s and 40s for marathons, half marathons I would run 6 days a week, now I’ve been running 3 – 4 days a week, but I alternate with one day running and one day biking. I am aiming for 2 days running and one biking and I think I’m going to do that. When the weather gets a little bit nicer, I will concentrate more on that but I’m not going to give up biking, my bike is my alternate, it’s easier on the body. I did the homework and I’m happy with what running has given back to me – I mean, here I am 40 years later, and I’m an old guy but I mean I feel okay, I can get around, the older you get the more you don’t want to end up in a bloody



nursing home or – oh jeeze, scary! Everything seems to be holding out okay, my knees and whatnot I feel them a little bit, but I'm not arthritic or anything. I had my last knee done in 2014 for a meniscus tear, but in my 30s and 40s I ran relatively injury free, but now in my older age I seem to be, you know, muscle pulls and knee issues. But it's okay, I'll keep running as long as I can, I don't know maybe tomorrow something is going to flare up and, you know, it's over, but no – not if I can help it, no! I am now back to training by myself, I don't run with others, I have got my routes, I know my mileage on those particular routes, out and back, so I just stick with that, it's close to my house, I like it. What I like about running is the aerobic benefits, in my mind, biking or running you are using your legs, I call these guys the V8s! Look at the difference between your arms and your legs, I mean your legs are a lot bigger, you get more calories burned for the buck here! Even at this age I'm still very mobile. With running, I've been doing it for so long and its ingrained in my head and I guess I am bit of a cement head, but it works for me and I like the benefits, I am relatively healthy I think and again I just feel good about myself, I don't need a walker or the oxygen tank – if I can avoid all that nonsense, I will. If I was out for a run tomorrow and I did a – I don't know – the big one or I did a face plant I would be a happy camper, yeah, it's fine. I just like being relatively healthy, I don't take any drugs, I don't take any supplements or vitamins, I just don't believe in it. I also don't have a GPS watch, I have got just a regular old Timex start / stop and I time my runs. If I am in an unfamiliar area and I want to run 8k, I know how long it takes me to run an 8k, just at my pace, so I just start the watch, 38 minutes, okay and then I know I have run an 8k, yeah just kind of lazy I guess, technology – there is a lot of stuff out there but, ugh. I time my runs and mark my mileage on my wall calendar that is something I have always done. During the winters though, sometimes I don't bother to time my runs anymore, I know it is going to be slower, so I just turn around at my

turnaround point. Lately I haven't even been putting my watch on, but now that the footing is getting better, I'll probably get it on – I'll start timing them again, just to see where I am at. I am slowing down, I used to run the 8k routine at my training pace in under 35 minutes and now I'm around 38 minutes, I'm definitely slowing down, that's the way it is. Oh God, I used to be able to do this in 35 minutes" no – not anymore pal, but maybe a little bit of speed training would help because I have not been doing that lately at all. It's just a matter of age, I'm slowing down, it's just the way it is, but I can still run and that is good. I'm not bragging or I hate to sound like a blow hard or something, but I think I am doing the right thing – I like it, I'm happy with where I am right now in this point of time, I'm 68 friggen years old – Jesus, I never thought it, it's hard to say that because I always think of myself as probably a bit younger. It's different now, I'm retired, there are 24 hours in a day, surely to God I can spend an hour of my time between running and a shower afterwards – that's all really, every day to keep myself in decent shape. Now that I am older, in the winter time, if it is really bad outside I just go indoors on the track to do workouts, or I hit the bike. I like running – it has worked for me. Everyone is different but to the general populous, do something, work up a sweat, get the heart rate going, swimming, I don't care! As people age they keep backing off and backing off, but no, don't quit, maybe back off a bit, but don't quit. That would be like somebody telling me to quit running "no you're running too much" "no! what are you talking about?". The trouble is – I see people around me, people my age and I think "get off your ass, put away the electronics, or turn off the God damn television set, put your shoes on and go for a walk". My doctor always tells me "I'm not going to make a heck of a lot of money off you" I only go basically once a year for regular check-ups and that's it! My doctor and I know what to test for to ensure I stay healthy based on family history and stuff. My dad died of an aneurism, so my doctor has taken an x-ray to get a baseline to see

where my artery is – it's normal, I don't take any high blood pressure medications – I don't want to – I mean if you have to, you have to – I understand that, I'm not going to be stupid about it, but I don't want to, no. I mean nobody gets out alive, there is going to be an end date for this at some point in time, I just want to finish it off feeling decent – you know. Like I said, if I was out running some day and I did a face plant in the ditch and they found me, well, so be it, I'm happy, and it's okay. I like running, but I'll be the first to admit with every foot strike its 3 or 4 times your body weight, that's a lot of pounding! I love running, but it is certainly not easy on the body, that's why, especially now, I try and mix it up with a little bit more cycling – a little bit less running, split the workouts between running and cycling. As far as running in general goes, there are some people who take five hours to run a marathon. I guess I should be more charitable for the people that are slower, if you're running over five hours for a marathon, in my mind – should you really be participating? That's not racing any more, in my mind, I don't know. I guess I'm in more of a competitive mindset than Joe Average. Overall, I'm happy, no regrets, I would have liked to do a little bit better – I never broke 34 in the 10k and I didn't break 2:45 in the full marathon, but in the half I think I did – yeah 1:16 I'm very, very more than happy with that and I have race certificates coming out of my ying yang!

I enjoy the whole idea about the running community, a bunch of people who are like minded getting together to do something really amazing. I like to give back to the community when I can, because running has given so much to me over the years. My wife and I have a bursary set up, mainly aimed at Northern Ontario athletes. The coach is the judge of who could benefit from this type of deal, some people of not so great economic means, and I totally understand that. I'm happy to help them out in their running career. My wife used to run, but she came down with some hip issues – I guess it is a female thing, so she doesn't run, but she bikes

now and we walk a lot! We are good; we do that every day as a matter of fact. At the end of the day, you can't avoid aging.

## **Discussion**

David also provided insight into the three main themes (tactics, social relations, and motives) to partially answer the research question by exploring the various ways he, as a masters' runner, was able to commit to the sport all these years. Although within each of these themes, the sub-themes expressed are slightly different, meaning that David described similar tactics, social relations, and motives, to participant one, but in a different way. This emphasizes the uniqueness between masters' runner's journeys as they run throughout their life, but also touches on the similarities within their stories that they might share. The themes and sub-themes that will be discussed along with the literature are as follows: tactics (sub-themes: technology, work schedule meets running schedule, book acts like a coach, realizing age and athletic ability, and process of recovering from injury), social relations (sub-theme: positive experiences as an active member in the running community), and motives (sub-theme: convenience of running and fight the calendar).

## **Tactics**

David relies on a unique collection of tactics that over the years have proven to help him be successful in his running journey. A combination of: a lack of up-to-date technology, organizing his work and running schedules, reliance on educational running books, realizing his age and his athletic ability and how it has been changing over time, and following a process of recovering from injury that fit his goals. David is a firm believer in remaining true to himself and sticking with what works for him; although it may seem beneficial, for example, to upgrade your

running technology, he doesn't follow suit due to his preference and trust he has in his method of recording his own runs.

**Technology.** David expresses his use of technology to be at a minimal level; instead of following the up and coming trends, he uses his Timex watch to record the total run time. This watch does not provide him with any additional information or feedback about his running. For David, he does not have the desire to upgrade his technology as he is a firm believer in sticking to what works for him and since his Timex watch has always worked for him, he does not see the need to change or upgrade his watch technology. With the use of a simple watch, David actively avoids any downfalls that go along with the adherence and dependency on a GPS watch / heart rate monitor. The two downfalls that he is able to avoid are the dependency and addiction of the watch and the run feedback that they are able to collect, as well as the pressure to run faster than they should because subconsciously, they are aware of the watch recording their running data (Sailors, 2009). Technology is a tactic that continues to assist David in his training as it allows him to enjoy running certain distances without any of the additional information. This also helps him to listen to his body at the time and to not be influenced by the additional data.

**Work schedule meets running schedule.** Running has been very important to David all throughout his running journey. He was adamant that he could get the training in regardless of what else he had going on in life at any given stage; he would always make it work. During his working years, he would arrange his running schedule around his work schedule in one of two ways: he would run to work, that way his workout was done before the work day even started, or he would come home from work, change into his running gear and head straight out the door, not allowing himself the option of skipping a training session. He always figured out what training schedule would work best for him so he was able to show up to races feeling prepared and well

trained, allowing himself to feel confident as the gun went off. David's retirement was a transition in his life that didn't necessarily enhance or impede his involvement in physical activity, it just gave him more time throughout the day to get his workout in (Scanlon & Mogel & Roberto, 2004). David described his retired life as having 24 hours in the day where he can surely spend an hour to work out and shower, to allow him to live a long, happy, and healthy life. Having more time available now, his training schedule and every day schedule is always evolving as it is now more flexible in nature. David was unique in the sense that once he had retired, his story didn't necessarily align with Scanlon-Mogel and Roberto's idea around life enhancing or impeding their adherence to physical activity. David discussed his retirement as a neutral factor in his adherence to his high level of running; during his working years he was able to run, and now, in his retirement, he is still able to find the time to run; running was important to him, so he didn't let his life have a huge influence over his ability to train and compete at a high level.

**Book acting like a coach.** David discusses two books that he has used for guidance throughout the duration of his running journey. These books were used alongside the guidance that he received from a coach as well as the information surrounding running he gained from running with a local group. One of the books he was referring to was highly scientific, due to his limited comprehension of some of the knowledge within that book; he relied more heavily on a simpler book – a book designed for a runner of any distance, also a book written in more latent and easily understood terms. He has relied on this book from the beginning of his running journey to the present day, as he expressed, it holds much information on every aspect of running: training and racing.

**Realizing age and athletic ability.** David is what Pfitzinger and Latter (2015) would term a ‘serious lifetime runner’, the only discrepancy was that he didn’t start racing in his childhood; he started to train and race in his 20’s. David is a well-seasoned runner who has experienced most, if not all, of what competitive running throughout the age categories has to offer; he has experienced the highs (e.g., Running a fast race, breaking goals) and the lows (e.g., Injury) of competitive racing. David reinforced Pfitzinger and Latter’s (2015) term ‘serious lifetime runner’ in the sense that he had run ever since he was 20 and had experienced much of what the sport of long distance running had to offer. David fit into the description of the ‘serious lifetime runner’ and is able to further support the idea of a ‘serious lifetime runner’ and how that presents itself into the life of the individual. In the early years of David’s running journey he didn’t express any age-related restriction to the training regimen he was maintaining. His body was young and healthy. It wasn’t until his 40’s where he first made a connection between his age and his athletic abilities. It was then he thought that he might want to switch his focus and slow down a little bit. By this point in his life, he had already raced numerous races of various distances ranging from 5k to a marathon and he was incredibly happy with what he had been able to accomplish. Over the years, David had developed an extensive aerobic background that has allowed him to perform at a high level as he ages (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). As time went on, David expresses his physical body as becoming creakier due to years of wear and tear that running had put on his body. Fast forward to the present day and David is now at a stage in life where he is still training and racing, but he races with the idea of “let the cards fall where they may”. This means that he has done the training, but with age becoming an increasingly more important factor in his training, the unknown of how his body is going to perform or react to the training or a race is growing as well. Along with the increasing amount of unknown that he is

experiencing, he has also switched his mindset to accommodate the age-graded performances. As Pfitzinger and Latter (2015) expressed, these athletes eventually shift their focus and tend to focus more on age-group racing. Focusing on age-group racing is important for an athlete in order for them to maintain realistic expectations of their body and realize the effects that the natural aging process has on their bodies. These athletes, just like David, are able to continue to race and produce results that are highly competitive with people their own age. Masters' athletes become much more aware of their age and their physical abilities once their body starts to become affected by the natural age-related physical decline. This is partially due to the fact that western society heavily values youthfulness over aging, regardless of how the individual accepts or adheres to an aging scheme (Baker et al., 2010; Logan et al., 1992). This is true for David as he is aware of his age-related decline, but continues to adhere to a healthy aging scheme where the decline is recognized, accepted, and a plan of action has been put into place so that he has as much control over this physical decline as possible.

**Process of recovering from injury.** David was struck with injuries in his older age, he expressed that in his 30s and 40s he ran relatively injury free. David has a very unique point of view when it comes to injuries and the natural age-related physical decline that he and his body were experiencing. He was adamant that he would do everything he could to ensure that he could run for as long as his body would let him, but when injury struck and he knew it was something that needed attention, he knew that he needed to follow the recovery process in the best way possible. When David did sustain injuries over the course of his running journey, he recognized right away that something wasn't right. Due to years of running, he was able to tell the difference between a simple muscle strain and an injury that required more attention. David is the prime example of an athlete who had "the ability to struggle and persist" (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p.



201). He would allow an injury to run its course and he would follow through with the recovery process no matter how long of a process that was going to be and then, when he was healthy again, his running would start back up; he was persistent. He had been running for such a long time throughout his life that it was ingrained in his head, it was part of his day to day routine and he knew how his body should feel. David supported the literature, with the finding that an identity is strengthened through the individual's ability to struggle and persist because his feats with injury followed that exact layout, he struggled with it, but persisted and never let an injury derail him to the point of no return. Once again, running was important to David; it was something that he was not going to give up very easily.

### **Social Relations**

Social relations remain as a positive experience for David as they have throughout the duration of his running journey up until the present moment. The two sub-themes for social relations are positive experience as an active member in the running community and giving back to the community. These are the two avenues where social relations between David and others have had a positive impact on his running journey and where he is able to get much of his inspiration from and desire to remain an active member in the running community in whatever capacity he sees fit as he ages and balances his identities, the natural aging process, and what is important to him.

**Positive experiences as an active member in the running community.** Throughout David's running journey, he had come into contact with numerous people with whom he was able to form relationships and therefore have positive experiences together. These positive descriptions of running play a huge role in the desire for an athlete to keep coming back to what is allowing them to have these positive experiences. During the early years of his running

journey, he surrounded himself with other runners who were much more experienced. From these runners he was able to gain a great insight into what running was all about and how best to go about running and training for long distances races. In his earlier years, David is classified as an ‘insider’ within the long distance running social world, meaning he was part of a running club and social groups and he understood the rules and rituals of this particular social context (Shipway et al., 2012). David also reinforced the running hierarchy, and fulfilled the role of an ‘insider’, due to his high level of participation in training and running at races. He had experienced a lot of what running had to offer; this added to his ability to be classified as an ‘insider’ because he was very knowledgeable about the sub-culture of long distance running. It was from these running clubs and social groups that he gained positive descriptions of running. He was always able to turn to a more experienced runner to seek guidance and that was something he did on a number of occasions, something he did to ensure his training would lead him to be successful in a marathon race. David knew that the race distance of a marathon (42.2k) was no lark and that proper training was needed; it was through these social connections that he was inspired and motivated. In his later years, he drew from many of the social connections that he had established in his earlier years. He is now a solo runner who is well set in his ways. These ‘ways’ include running his own routes by his house. They have proven to be successful for him and continue to allow him to train in a way that he can still race the shorter distances. For David, social relations leading to positive experiences also occurred outside of his training regimen. He expressed a positive experience with a shoemaker which allowed him to train and race in a pair of shoes for a long duration of time due to the fact that they were re-soled. This allowed David to be true to himself and stick to what he liked about running and his running equipment, while being reinforced by the positive experience that he had with the shoemaker as he allowed for him

to wear these shoes longer. He has also expressed that within his recent years, his wife has been supportive of his athletic pursuit. This encourages him to express even greater positive descriptions of running due to the fact it does not put any strain on his life at home. Spouses may influence the athlete's sport participation in a number of ways; for this participant in particular, his "spouse did not question [his] regular participation [and she] understood that sport participation was important to [her] partner" (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 375). He is still experiencing positive times as an active member within the running community.

**Giving back to the community.** It wasn't until later in his running journey that he expressed his desire to give back to the running community; David volunteered at many races, working at the water stations and so on, but it wasn't until later life where giving back to the community became a forefront piece in his mind. There are numerous ways a runner is able to give back to the community, but it is important for them to find something that they are passionate about and that will work for them in the long run. David and his wife decided that aiding young runners through a bursary is the best way for them to give back to the running community. Inspiring young runners to be able to be their best was a passion for David. It is also in his mind that money shouldn't be a worry for these young runners and that he would be able to help them on an annual schedule. Once again, the aging population is seen as people who are unable to give back to society, instead they just take away from it, but David has challenged that idea and made efforts to pay it back (Baker et al., 2010). David differed in the sense that he did not want to be viewed as an aging individual who only takes from society; he made the conscious effort to give back to the running community in a way that he and his wife were proud of and in a way that was visibly helpful to others. He differed from the common stereotype of the physically active aging population being unable to give back to the community (Baker et al.,

2010). As he ages, giving back to the community proves itself to be another way that he can remain connected to the running social world and it adds a layer to his identity as he is much more than just an athlete at this point in his life. Being able to give back and assist young runners in their running journeys provides David with another positive experience which reinforces his identity and his desire to remain part of the community.

### **Motives**

“Masters athletes are of particular interest because they may have developed and adopted motivational strategies that allow them to maintain sport involvement across the lifespan in spite of age-related performance declines” (Medic, 2010, p. 106). Motives – the reasons behind why human beings do what they do. David’s motive to continue to adhere to a high level of commitment to his running regimen is highly driven by two factors: the convenience of running and his desire to fight the calendar. The sheer convenience of running is a large driving factor for David’s adherence to this training regimen in the sense that he is able to run anywhere he goes; all he needs is his running shoes and the ability to get outside. He is able to run on his holidays and right out of his front door. The other motive that David uses in order to continue to run is his persistent fight against the calendar, to avoid the age-related physical decline to the best of his ability, and to postpone the inevitable ill-health that the aging population navigates. For David, his motives are seen to be something that changed over the years; the first set of motives occurred in his early running years and they have more recently changed as he has been experiencing age-related performance declines with his physical abilities. In his earlier running years, David was “more motivated by personal goal achievement” (Ogles & Masters, 2000, p. 130), meaning that he wanted to improve his race times with each race he entered. In this stage in

David's life he is "more motivated by a general health orientation" (Ogles & Masters, 2000, p. 130) although he still has a competitive edge to his running.

**Convenience of running.** The convenience of running was something that David always came back to. The whole notion that in order to run you didn't need any special equipment, you didn't have to drive anywhere or have a membership, all you had to do was put your shoes on and go out the door. The convenience of running was and is still a huge motive for David to continue to run. He was able to run anywhere from right outside of his front door to when he was on vacation or traveling. Family identity played a role in the convenience of running for David. He was married, but didn't have any children, meaning he fulfilled the role of a husband. His family identity played a positive role in his training and racing. In earlier years, his wife would run with him, allowing this to be a joint activity, but due to health issues on her end, this is no longer an option. He and his wife remain active through walking together, outside of his typical training. David continues to express the ease he has when it comes to his training, his wife is fully understanding of his commitment and desire to continue to run, and therefore his family identity of a husband does not create friction with his identity of a runner. His family identity actually encourages him to continue to train (Dionigi et al., 2012). Pursuing masters athletics was not challenged by his family identity as a husband, and this positively influenced his ability to participate in long distance running. His story reinforced the literature, in the sense that sport participation was made possible due to the lack of friction with other identities that the individual wanted to hold (Dionigi et al., 2012). David is a masters' athlete; he doesn't necessarily rely solely on the support from his family in order to maintain his high level of sport participation, and it is easy for him to continue both roles without any added friction. Communication between

David and his wife is the key to allowing him to maintain both identities, as this is a shared journey.

**Fight the calendar.** The notion of fighting the calendar is something that David expresses with great passion as he has been navigating the aging process. “Older people involved in regular exercise and sport have shown that [they participate for reasons such as] enjoyment, competitiveness, physical fitness, health benefits, social [aspect], travel, stress relief, personal challenge, and skill development” (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008, p. 31). This trend reflects postponing deep old age (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990) and resisting the aging body (Gilleard & Higgs, 2002). David highlights the reason for participation in sport to be the health benefits that he is able to receive or, more importantly, the natural age-related health decline that he is actively able to avoid at all costs. His story reinforces the reason to participate as a means to achieve health benefits among other reasons, such as a challenge, the social aspect, physical fitness and, evidently, competitiveness (Reaburn & Dascombe, 2008). He is striving to continue to be independent and self-sufficient well into his aging process. He is actively fighting the common notion of “images and understanding of aging and older people [as] primarily associated with ill health, frailty, loss, disability, disengagement, and dependency on the health care system” (Dionigi, 2006a, p. 181). David is experiencing a potential time of uneasiness as his body continues to age and as he fights to hold onto his health and physical well-being, but he is also realistic in the sense that if he has to seek medical interventions he will, but before that he will do everything he can to actively avoid the necessity of any such interventions. David had expressed that the aging population tends to slow down and seek medical interventions more frequently due to health needs, but what they are missing is the physical activity and fueling their bodies correctly, and with those changes they should be able to avoid more of the medical

interventions that they are seeking. David is actively trying to avoid what he sees other people his age go through. With the notion that David is actively trying to avoid age-related decline by remaining physically active and that he is well aware of potential declines and has a high degree of acceptance to that as well, he is both fighting the aging process and touching on the positive aspects of the aging narrative by recognizing his ability to use sport participation to celebrate good health, exploration, challenge, and productivity (Dionigi, 2006b).

The phenomenon of older people competing in sport may be more complex than either resistance, feelings of personal empowerment, or an expression of the undesirability of deep old age. This participation may instead represent a simultaneous interaction and negotiation of all these dimensions (Dionigi, 2006a, p. 184)

This is exactly how David is navigating the aging process.

### **Setting the Stage: Stanley**

The pseudonym Stanley has been chosen to represent this athlete. Every description with each participant was very different from one another. Stanley had a personality that was quiet, reserved, and demonstrated the fact that he was well-spoken but took the time to think through what he was going to say and how he was going to share it. As the researcher, I met with Stanley at his place of work. I was invited into his office where we had the space to engage in our conversation. This location was ideal for this interview because it was a place that was convenient to the participant and a place where he was comfortable. Once we were sitting down, I took the time to share the purpose of the project and to share what I was asking of him. He received the information well and began to share his story starting from the beginning. Time between asking the question and receiving the answer was critical; it was necessary to allow the time for him to think about the question and then to think about how he wanted to answer it

before he started to answer. This was something that I learned throughout the interview process with him. By the second interview, I allowed much more time for him to answer, realizing that this was important to allow him the time to fully share his journey without me stifling his story telling by cutting in too early. Stanley was also very humble; he brought a bag full of his race medals that he had earned over the years. “I grabbed a few medals out of my closet” he said as he was pulling medals out of this bag by the handful. He was excited to talk about a few of them and tell the stories behind those medals and why those ones were very important to him (Figure 5). He had also brought with him a book which he called his race log. This book is where he record all of the races that he had run over the years; he expressed that there were just over 100 entries in his race log (Figure 5.2). This is something that is important to him and it helped him to share his story in a temporal way.



Figure 5. Stanley’s artefact from interview 1 - medals



RACE	TIME	OVERALL	AGE GROUP
Sept 99 Ramsey Tour 1/2 Mar 20K	1:50:55	7 <sup>th</sup> / 10 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup> / 25 <sup>th</sup>
July 2000 Firecracker 5K	19:20	1 <sup>st</sup> / 6	5 <sup>th</sup> / 5
Aug 2000 Copeland 5K Road 5K	16:50	9 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Aug 2000 North Bay 5K	18:29	7 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Aug 2000 St. Joseph Island 10K	38:42	4 <sup>th</sup> / 10	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Sept 2000 Ramsey Tour 1/2 Mar 20K	1:47:01	5 <sup>th</sup> / 10	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Oct 2000 CIBC Run 5K	16:57	5 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Oct 2000 Toronto 1/2 Marathon 20K	1:25:04	3 <sup>rd</sup> / 100	8 <sup>th</sup> / 25
July 01 Firecracker 5K	18:33	9 <sup>th</sup> / 21	5 <sup>th</sup> / 5
July 2001 Massey 2 Marathon 41.1	1:25:38	10 <sup>th</sup> / 41	4 <sup>th</sup> / 5
July 2001 Twilight Trek Med (W) 5K	14:55	5 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Aug 01 Copeland 5K Rd Race 5K	17:55	5 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Aug 01 Dufferin Chase Ultramarathon 50K cycle, 50km, 20km	5:19:01	7 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Aug 01 St. Joseph Island 10K	38:46	5 <sup>th</sup> / 10	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Sept 01 Ramsey Tour 5K	17:46	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 10	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Sept 23, 01 Toronto Waterfront 1/2 Mar 20K	1:21:57	5 <sup>th</sup> / 100	16 / 247
Sept 26, 01 CIBC Run 5K	16:56	1 <sup>st</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Oct 01 Int'l Marathon 1/2 Mar 20K	1:22:56	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 100	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 25
Sept 02 Ramsey Tour 1/2 Mar 20K	1:35:20	11 / ?	4 / 5
Oct 02 CIBC Run 5K	17:31	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
July 03 Firecracker 5K	15:58	7 <sup>th</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
July 03 Copeland Club Race 5K	17:54	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
July 03 Course du Festival de St. Joseph (St. Joseph, Ontario) 5K	16:16	11 <sup>th</sup> / 175	? / ?
Aug 01 St. Joseph Island 10K	39:04	8 <sup>th</sup> / 10	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Sept 01 Ramsey Tour 5K	18:08	10 <sup>th</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Oct 01 CIBC Run 5K	18:31	5 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Oct 01 Ultramarathon 10K	3:53	9 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
Sept 04 Ramsey Tour 5K	17:22	3 <sup>rd</sup> / 10	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Oct 04 CIBC Run 5K	18:42	4 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
May 04 Sun Run 5K	38:52	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 10	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
May 04 Ft. Franks (Cumbria) 5K	18:22	7 <sup>th</sup> / 21	2 <sup>nd</sup> / 1
July 04 Wilton Firecracker 5K	18:49	13 <sup>th</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
July 04 Copeland Club Race 5K	17:14	3 <sup>rd</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1
Sept 04 Ramsey Tour 5K	18:29	5 <sup>th</sup> / 21	1 <sup>st</sup> / 1

Figure 5.1. Stanley’s artefact from interview 2 – race log

## Results

### From race one and still recording: My race log.

My life as a runner started in my late 20’s; my race log is what I have used to track every race I have run since the very beginning. In my race log I recorded the important information, like the location of the race, my chip time, my overall place, and my place in my age category. My race log acts as a cool reminder to show what I have accomplished over the years. For example, I did my first half marathon after like just doing two 10ks, I ran a good time for just a beginner! Then I started doing a lot and in 1995 I did quite a bit, yeah so, it didn’t take me long to get fast. My race log has been really neat to be able to go back and look at what I have done throughout the years, to see how I have improved!

### **Active to actively running.**

I started running in my late 20's although I was always like pretty active before running. I played tennis competitively and before that I played hockey when I was in my teens. I would do other things like cycling and sometimes I would go for jogs in the summer, like just little jogs, you know, but nothing really steady. I did have a couple of friends who were runners, and that's how I began, I just started to go out running with them. These friends had done several marathons and half marathons at the time; they had the experience that I was lacking. So, I slowly got into it – starting with a 10k and a 5k. I would always look up to my friends and other local runners because they were still pretty good in their 50s and even 60s so, I tried to like, you know, emulate them. I basically started running because it made me feel good. At the time I started to run I was teaching elementary school. Teaching elementary school was a stressful job, so it was a good way to relieve stress. Like most runners do, they run to relieve the stress. Basically, that's how I got into running. Once I started running, everything else kind of stopped. I played tennis on and off, just played in the summer a bit, you know, that's about it. I just found running more convenient and less time consuming than all of the other sports, to go play hockey or play tennis or whatever, you got more benefits in a shorter period of time and then you still had the same feeling like, feeling really good after, yeah, so that's why I kind of gave up playing organized sports. You can just go run anytime; you don't have to drive anywhere. I ran with my runner friends a couple times a week, I was running consistently, I was at least getting out to run 3 times a week, 4 times a week, you know, depending on circumstances. I haven't always followed like a specific training plan, you know. My training was: go for a run once during the week – two times during the week and then on weekends maybe once - you know. If I was lucky I could get 4 runs in, 40-45 minutes and most of them were just easy runs. Being a teacher, I

would have the summer off, so I would get in some good training in the summer, do a bit of speed work in June, July, and August. That's when I would have more time for it. I would try to do a few faster runs once in a while – and yeah so it was fun, I enjoyed it. Then I would always end up having good race times in September and October, that is when I would reach my yearly peak. In the summer, then I'd get more fit from doing like more consistent running – doing races too. Sometimes I would just do the races as speed work and just go run the rest of the time at my own pace. But it wasn't like consistent all year around, it was sporadic, kind of, when I had more time, so in the winter it was just maintaining a decent level of fitness. I would also swim in the winter, mix it up a bit, the weather wasn't great for running outside. In the spring you know, I would just run, and in the summer, I would be a little more focused, I had more time and the weather was nicer. 99% of my runs were outside, I don't like – well treadmills – I'm not crazy about them. Teaching also affected my racing, I always wanted to do the Around the Bay race, but I never got around to it because it was just a bad time of year, like with school and all that. The Around the Bay race is always in April, but I never felt like I had good enough training to do it at that time of year. It was just too early in the year, I would always get really good in July and August and then September I would reach like a good peak, you know.

**I had all my best times in my late 30s.**

For a year, in my early 30s I had a few difficulties, I took a bit of time but I would still go out and run when I could. When I was in my mid to late 30s I would just go out and run, still without following a specific training plan. I had all my best times when I was in my mid to late 30s. Around this time, I peaked. I ran some fast races in Toronto, the one by the lake there, the fast one, and some other fast 10ks and 5k. Those were my best, but that was all like around the same time period there, early 2000's. I did a lot of races around this time, it didn't take me long

to get fast, running just seemed to go well for me. I always placed well. I got in good shape, I did a lot, that's when I had my best 10k times and Montreal Marathon, that was my second marathon, and my first marathon – yeah it didn't go very well. I didn't train enough for it, I should have known that going into it. I suffered the last 10k – I was around 1:27 at the half so I thought I could do like under three for the marathon, but I didn't know much about marathons. I didn't know how you have to train for marathons, so yeah that is basically the way it went, it was a learning experience. I had my two kids when I was in my late 30s so, like with little kids you kind of get busy with other stuff and with work, it's working and so... I would still run 2 – 3 times a week on average. Running was convenient, I didn't have to go to a gym or to go play hockey late at night, it's just – you go put your stuff on and go, you're done in an hour or less, you know? With running you can also run at different paces. I always ran according to how I felt, so if I felt tired I would run slower, if I felt energetic I would push myself to go faster. This is how running fit into my life and how running worked for me.

My running friends who got me into running quit once they got into their 40s, they didn't run anymore, but I found a new group of friends to run with, it was fun, keeps you motivated and like it's good to have friends who like the same thing. Running is also social and that is part of what keeps it interesting. In my early 40s I qualified for Boston in the last marathon I raced. I made it just under the qualifying time and I was like 40 at the time – 41, yeah 41. That was a good race for me. After 40 I slowed down a bit, but still had some good times. My kids were young when I qualified for Boston and it was in April, so I was still busy with the school year, it was complicated. Sometimes life gets in the way and not everything goes as planned, but you make do and it all works out. In the marathons I did, I guess I figured I should have been able to go faster but I probably didn't train like enough mileage or not specifically enough. I should

have been able to do a sub three hour marathon, and I never quite could do it, so I probably didn't train right, you know, or I didn't have enough experience, it's okay though, I still qualified for Boston. I could have probably done better if I had like – if I was more structured, but I never really got to do it. I would just go run some speed workouts like in the summer time with a group of friends, but still didn't have a solid training schedule. Through my experience I have learned that my favourite distance would be the 10k or the half marathon. I've never – like I've done 3 marathons, but I've never really liked to run that long, you know three hours, I just... I just... I don't know, I don't like being out there that long. In a half marathon, you can run faster and it's over in, you know an hour and a half, that is what is exciting for me. My best time was like 1:20 when I was in really good shape, when I reached my overall peak. In my late 40s I started running with a local group, I was invited out to join the group on their Saturday runs. I started going and then I enjoyed it, it was fun, instead of always running alone, you get to run with a group and socialize a bit, these were mostly long slow runs.

### **Competitive across the board over 50 – 5k, 10k, and half marathon medals.**

My most prized possession from over the age of 50 would be these three medals. I have a first place age category medal from the 5k, a 10k and a half marathon, all from over the age of 50. It's really neat to see how I am competitive across the board, across the different distances and this all happened in the last three years! It would be nice to get a marathon medal – in first over the age of 50, but then I would have to run like five times a week, and, you know, it's just hard. So, that would be like the best thing that I have done since over 50!

From 50 to last summer I still had some good race times, good times for my age group, I would be always like in the top three or so, although before 50, you know, it was – I was faster so that's about it. I'm in a new age group now, 50-59, so still over 50 – some good times, you

know. I was able to run a 1:31 and that was over 50. So, I got tired of coming second in the halves so I switched to the 10k, so I would place really well. I guess this is how I ensured I would place well, I raced the distances where I didn't know there would be for sure competition. Over 50 – even my results have been better, like from 50 to now because there are fewer competitors. There are less people in your age group that run pretty fast, so I tend to place higher in my age category.

### **Decline due to injury.**

I hadn't had any serious injuries up until the past summer. I tore my Achilles tendon while I was playing tennis and this has definitely been my most difficult injury to come back from. I haven't been able to do long runs for a few months; I'm just not fully healed. Not being able to run really makes me miss the feeling - the good feelings you get after running. I try doing other things but it doesn't quite match the feeling from running – like swimming or you know, bicycling, they are good for you, but the feeling isn't the same. Since my injury, it's been kind of different. Basically, I'm just trying to get back to like a decent fitness level, because it's like everything was put back in terms of my fitness level, it's just hard to get back to where you were. But now that my injury is slowly starting to get better I have been able to start going out for runs again. It's a slow and steady recovery process though, I can't push it too fast too soon or else I will just reinjure myself. The good thing is that I still go out and run with the same running group, I have been running mostly weekends, like Saturday / Sunday and then tried maybe once during the week if I can get a run in. When the weather gets nicer it will be easier to get out and run more. This injury kind of slowed everything down, yeah, and then I can't run like I used to, it's sore sometimes so – just have to go around to what you can do and it will get better – with time. Basically, I'm just running on Saturday / Sunday and I'll take the dog on walks during the

week – it’s good – I’ll get back to it soon– hopefully I can do a 5k or 10k this summer, maybe – go see how I feel and go from there. I would like to be able to do a half with no soreness or pain. That would be my goal for maybe the fall – who knows, I can’t speed up this recovery. I would have liked to do a race that is coming up soon, but I am not anywhere ready to do that yet... with the injury and my current fitness level. It’s disappointing but, I mean it is what it is – just have to go one day at a time, it’s a slow recovery. It’s true once you get into your like mid 50s then you start – you slow down some more – it’s only natural. I’m perfectly fine with it, I mean there is nothing you can do about it so, just go according to your capacities, I guess. With my current fitness level – I don’t want to just go and do a race – like if I can’t run a decent time, you know, I wouldn’t be happy running a 25-26 minute 5k, I wouldn’t – like even though that would be good right now – I’m going to wait until I feel a little better and in better shape before I try to race again. Nowadays, I’m more competitive with myself, for me racing is more than being competitive with anyone else, it’s just for myself, you know, to see how I can do. I would also like to be fit enough to do a decent time for my age group, you know – so that I could probably like be in the top few for my age group – would be like decent for me. My current job is very flexible, like I’ll be able to maybe go out once its nicer, I’ll go out for a run on my lunch, you know, half an hour or something. I don’t get the whole summer off, but we will see, my schedule is flexible here. So, hopefully, I will have time to run and I will be healthy enough to run more. Right now, I run mostly just Saturdays and Sundays until I am fully healed. I still enjoy running and hopefully I can get back from injuries’ but it is still sore, you know, so I can’t run like I used to, but I think with time it will get better. It’s crazy the feeling you can get from running – once again, it is not matched by anything else. It’s something that is unique to running. The feeling I get from running is what has kept me running from my late 20s until now. It made me feel good

and I feel healthy, you know, and I'm in good shape. Basically- running was easy to do, not time consuming and I liked the good endorphins from after the run, that's why I do it. Earlier on, especially being a teacher it's stressful so it would always be a good stress reliever for me. I always ran according to how I felt, and I still do, I would push myself when I feel energetic and run slower when I feel tired and with the injury and my fitness level not being where it used to be. Training can be whatever you make out of it, you have control over what you do. Things are changing over the years, I've noticed I've gained a few extra pounds in the last year, but it's probably because I don't maintain the same fitness level as I used to – and then your metabolism slows down too I guess, yeah so, a few extra pounds, but hopefully I can shed those in the summer time. Running is something that I have always come back to even when life would get in the way of my training. With running, sometimes you go for a few years and you really want to train a lot and then it tapers off and then it comes back – you get the urge to do some races again. Life events happen and stuff and you kind of lose your motivation and then it comes back, yeah, or injuries, you always keep coming back, that's the important part! In my race log you can see where I was busy with life and where I had come back to running. I have recorded just over 100 maybe like 101 races, all totaled up, yeah but I mean like – some people have hundreds and hundreds of races so, it's not really – but yeah, I like to look at it once in a while, see how things have changed, cause you kind of slow down with age, you know? Like I've said, I always had my best times when I was like mid to late 30s and then after 40 – it was kind of like – slow down a bit, but still had some good times. From 50 till last summer still had good, good times for my age group, I would be always like in the top three or so.



## **Discussion**

Stanley provided insight into how he used tactics, social relations, and motives to be able to continue to run all these years. These themes will be discussed in relation to their sub-themes and the literature. The sub-themes are as follows: tactics (sub-themes: lack of training plan, work schedule meets running schedule, realizing age and athletic ability, and process of recovering from injury); social relations (sub-theme: positive experience as an active member in the running community); motives (sub-themes: convenience of running and fight the calendar).

## **Tactics**

Throughout this vignette the various tactics used by Stanley were explained; these tactics remained the same throughout the aging process as well as some of them changed over time to better accommodate what the runner was experiencing. The sub-themes in this vignette are the lack of a specific training plan, work schedule meets running schedule, realizing age and athletic ability and the process of recovering from injury. The lack of a specific training plan is something unique to this athlete. Although expressed as the lack of a specific training plan, Stanley did follow a loosely defined plan, unique to himself, but yet worked with his obligations and his needs as a runner and then as a masters runner. His work schedule made an impact on his training schedule but, rather than him focusing on the day to day interaction between these two schedules, he discussed the yearly impact they had on each other. His ability to consider his age, age-related physical declines, and his physical abilities encouraged him to go through the training and aging process with minimal friction and negative thoughts surrounding his age-related decrease in his performance. This realization helps foster a healthy age and athletic process. Stanley expressed his minimal interaction with the process of recovering from an injury, due to the fact he ran relatively injury free in his younger years. It wasn't until the more recent

years where he described an impact on his ability to train due to the severity of an injury. His process of recovering from injury was something that occurred over the age of 50, intertwining the recovery process along with the aging process and the natural decline in physical abilities.

**Lack of specific training plan.** Unique to Stanley, he expressed his lack of a specific training plan, a tactic that remained consistent throughout the duration of his running journey and still to the present day. It is normal to see high performance runners adhering to a training schedule often developed by a coach, but in Stanley's case his training was much more laid back and was carried out in a way that might appear to be carefree and stress free. Stanley provided insight into the training plan that he adhered to; he would go out to run anywhere from two to four times a week, as simple as that. The lack of a specific training plan had a lot to do with the available time that he had left in his day to set aside and use as time to train. He was busy with his family and career obligations, so by carrying out a more carefree, less strict training regimen he was able to maintain, and balance to some degree, all aspects of this life. This flexible training plan allowed for him to take the time to focus on his career and family obligations when that was needed, but it also enabled him to focus more on his training during the summer months when his career obligations lessened and he had more available time. Stanley still expresses a lack of specific training plan in his current regimen, but this is highly influenced by the injury he is recovering from.

**Work schedule meets running schedule.** Stanley's work schedule was unique to his career; he had the summer months off work. This allowed him to have more time to devote to training in the summer months, leading him to a yearly physical fitness peak in September and October. His career path supported the idea as it has both "impeded [and] enhanced [his] level of involvement in physical activity" (Scanlon & Mogel & Roberto, 2004, p. 42). The enhancement

brought on by his career path in relation to his adherence to his training regimen was seen in his increase of available time to devote to running during the summer months, which inevitably prepared him physically for a race season, at which he was able to perform well. Stanley expressed that his chosen career path may have impeded his ability to adhere to his unique training regimen throughout the year due to the career obligations that would take up much of his time at various points in the year, such as in April, when the school year was coming to an end. It was the acceptance of how his running and work schedules came together that allowed him to succeed. Now, he is granted a high level of understanding of the meshing of his work and running schedules to allow both to flourish. Currently, he still has some vacation time in the summer, but it is much less time, this affects his training schedule as he is working for more of the year.

**Realizing age and athletic ability.** Making the connection between his age and his athletic ability was a tactic that was used by Stanley to ensure he was training to his capacity and performing in a way that was age-appropriate, putting him into the leading competitor category. Stanley described much of the same things that the typical ‘youngest’ master athlete (ages 35-39) would experience when he was going through that stage of life. He described career and family obligations as putting time restraints on his available time, which left him faced with three demanding identities trying to co-occur (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). At this point in his life he was forced into an identity management phase, where he was navigating all his identities, trying to find a balance that would work for every aspect of his life at the time (Dionigi, 2002). With realizing his age and his athletic ability, Stanley was considered a ‘born-again masters runner’ although on a much smaller scale, this was termed by Pfitzinger and Latter (2015). The ‘born-again masters runner’ is a mix between the ‘serious lifetime runner’ and the ‘new-to-the-sport

masters runner' (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). Stanley fell into this category due to his expression of the combination of both of these types of masters runners. Stanley was similar to the 'new-to-the-sport' masters runners in the sense that he was seeing large increases in his physical abilities very quickly relating to the sudden and noticeable increase in his physiological fitness as well as his overall health (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). Stanley relates to the 'born-again masters runner' on a much smaller scale due to the fact that he expressed that his career and family obligations became precedent over his athletic desires and therefore his athletic pursuit took a back seat, but only for a number of years, before he was able to reintroduce himself to it and become highly committed once again. Stanley strongly reinforced the 'born-again masters runner' category. His ability to realize his age and athletic ability allows him to follow his physical fitness journey alongside his aging process in a way that is liberating and does not smother his positive outlook on his continued performance. He is able to recognize the various points in his life where he excelled and the points in his life where he began to slow down in terms of his athletic performance; this occurred around the age of 40 for participant three. With this awareness of his age and the effects that it has on his athletic performance, he is able to continue to train and appreciate what his body was able to do on a physical scale; this light-heartedness when it comes down to aging and slowing down, assists him in the fact that he greets the physical decline in a positive and accepting way, allowing him to still excel when compared to his age-related performances.

**Process of recovering from injury.** Stanley expresses his appreciation for the fact that the majority of his running journey occurred injury free. He was able to maintain his training and race schedule without the interruptions of injury causing him to adjust his schedule. Stanley articulates that his most serious injury didn't occur until recently, during the most recent summer

months. This injury put a stop to his ability to maintain his loose training schedule; the injury was too severe; it stopped him from engaging in long runs for a period of 8-9 months. Due to his lack of physical ability to run at his preferred level at this point, he turned to alternate training as a means to hold onto his fitness level; he participates in swimming and biking. Stanley was able to express his “ability to struggle and persist” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 201) throughout the time of his injury, although he did it with much grief. Instead of trying to push through this injury and continue to run when he knew that he needed the time to heal, he engaged in a slow recovery process, which was important to realize that he shouldn’t force a recovery because there is nothing he can do to speed up the process. Stanley demonstrated his ability to struggle through the initial stage of his injury recovery, supporting the literature. He struggles with the fact that his level of physical fitness is suffering. Mixed into the recovery process he also accepts his age as part of the reason for his slow recovery process; he expresses that once he got older, slowing down is part of the natural process - his injury just highlighted and enhanced the process of him slowing down physically. Stanley demonstrates his ability to persist as his injury slowly begins to heal, also reinforcing the literature due to his ability to struggle and then continue to persist (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991). He has been able to reintroduce himself to running, by incorporating some weekend runs into his schedule. He continues to demonstrate his ability to persist by thinking about races he would like to do and the various steps that he would have to take before he would feel that he was ready and at a point in his fitness journey that he would be able to race a time that he would be happy with.

### **Social Relations**

Throughout the vignette, Stanley shared his social relations that fostered many positive experiences that he received as an active member in the running community. Being part of the

social world of long distance running and being considered an ‘insider’ within that community, allows for that particular identity to be produced and shaped (Cosh et al., 2013; Shipway et al., 2012) and therefore further enhanced and supported. It was the positive social relations that were described by Stanley that initially introduced him to the long distance running community and the continuation of the social relations kept him involved and kept him running, until he was eventually able to break away and maintain this identity in a more independent fashion.

**Positive experience as an active member in the running community.** Similar to other runners, the social relations that have been formed over the years of running are something that tends to produce positive experiences for the individual. Stanley was introduced to running by some of his friends who had experience with training and racing, their involvement and understanding of running was a huge catalyst for Stanley to be able to engage in his own running journey. He has the help and support from friends; he knows people he could seek information and guidance from, to ensure he was engaging with running in a healthy fashion. Social relations are something that can change over time, as individuals are absorbed into various other walks of life, such as career and family obligations. The initial group of friends that assisted Stanley on his running journey all left running when they reached their 40’s. This was a drastic change for Stanley as his long-distance social world was altered, completely out of his control; however, he was able to maintain his running journey and was soon integrated into a new social group of long distance runners. The smoothness of this shift in his involvement with various social worlds within the long distance community may have been due to the fact that he had already formed an identity with running and was considered an ‘insider’ within the greater social world of long distance running (Shipway et al., 2012). He reinforced the literature by Shipway et al. (2012) by the fact he understood the rules and rituals of the social world before he was thrown into the

change of social running group that he had been part of; this allowed the transition to be easier. It is the positive experiences he receives through other runners and the social aspect of running that keeps him as an active member in the running community.

### **Motives**

Stanley outlined his motives for his adherence to his training regimen; one motive he expressed is the convenience of running in relation to the time he spent participating in other organized sport versus the time that running took. He also expressed the motive of fighting the calendar or, more accurately, accepting the inevitable aging process and age-related decline in physical abilities, especially when in tandem with an injury. He expresses himself to be in divergence of Baker et al. (2010), which is understood for masters athletes to put up a fight against the age-related physical decline to actively and aggressively avoid ill health and potential isolation that is commonly seen within the older age population.

**Convenience of running.** Stanley expressed the convenience of running in relation to the actual duration of running vs. other organized sports. He had participated in other organized sports such as hockey and tennis, but finds that he is able to get the same positive feelings from running in a much shorter time. This drew him to the conclusion that running is more time efficient as he didn't have to drive anywhere and he could get the same good feelings post exercise in a much shorter amount of time. Stanley expressed the ease of running in the sense that it was opposite to organized sport in relation to the time of day it could take place. With his previous organized sport, he was tied into a time commitment that was often late at night; this was interfering with other obligations that he had as a father and as an elementary school teacher. Running was a better fit for him. Presently, Stanley is still recognizing the convenience of running as he discusses the ease of training once he is healed from his injury.

**Fight the calendar.** “Just go according to your capacities, I guess” (Stanley). Stanley is unique in the way he expresses his fight against the aging process; he expresses less of a fight and is more focused on accepting it as it is a natural process that is inevitable for him to go through. Instead of putting up a strong fight against the aging process he embraces it; this may be due to his injury which has forced him to step away from running for a prolonged period of time. With the acknowledgment of his age-related decline and his debilitating injury all occurring simultaneously, the act of embracing the decline proved to be a healthy route to go in order to stay positive and remain in the mindset of returning to running once he regains his health. While much of the competitive masters athlete population tends to err on the side of engaging in competitive sport as a means to “avoid ill health and isolation” (Baker et al., 2010, p.8), Stanley doesn’t express the desire to put up a fight against the aging process and the possibilities of ill health or isolation later in life; he is much more accepting of the aging process and his specific running journey, dealing with body changes due to engaging in less physical activity than he was used to, which was due to the injury. This is where Stanley differs in terms of what previous literature has mentioned, where athletes tend to actively try to avoid ill health, sometimes by using unhealthy measures, such as an unhealthy adherence to a training regimen.

### **Setting the Stage: Convergences**

After meeting with each participant twice to hear about their lifetime journey as a runner; convergences and diverges were evident. These participants had expressed things that were similar to each other’s stories and things that were unique to their personal story. The interesting thing about each participant’s story when looking at them in line with one another was that regardless of the similarities and differences, each participant was able to express a life of running, managing various aspects of life and overcoming trials and tribulations in a way that



worked for them and that allowed them to continue running as they saw fit within their lives.

This vignette was written to demonstrate the convergences that are shared between the participants, to highlight how the athletic identity played a successful role within each of their lives from the beginning of their story to the present day.

## **Results**

Running is very hard on the body; every step is 3 – 4 times your body weight and that is a lot of pounding on the joints, a lot of wear and tear. Throughout the years, rest or a rest day has been something that is a must. I would never run seven days a week; it was always a focus of mine to take a rest day somewhere in there - at least one day a week! Whether this rest day was the same day every week, or if it was on a looser training schedule, it would always have to happen, this is how I would ensure that I would be able to train to the level that I wanted.

Although I include one day of rest within the training schedule, there is also more rest embedded within the greater training plan. The active training days would fluctuate, allowing for days where the rest time would be a long slow run and the other days would consist of harder hill training or repeat interval style workouts. I would be doing a rest, work, rest, work, pattern six days a week – that’s what I did. Sometimes your body wouldn’t agree with the workout schedule that was set for that week and your body would be seeking rest on a day where I should be working hard. When I would go out on a run and I felt flat at the beginning and I thought it was going to get better, but it didn’t, I would just turn around and go home. It’s not worth it and you’re better off resting, if you’re pooched, don’t fight it, just forget it and move on. When you’re on a run and you feel like shit – yeah, go home.

Rest was also very important for recovery; this included recovery from races and recovery from injury when rest was my only option to be able to get back to my regular training.

I'm not ironman. Rest was incorporated into the training year on four different levels; it is also included on a greater scale, where there are times within the year that rest would become more evident – life events would become a priority and rest when it came to running would be accepted. This never lasted too long and I was always able to come back to running in due time.

Realizing when my body needed rest and allowing myself to take that time, and recover, helped me to show up to the races prepared. I would show up to the race confident in my abilities because I knew I had put in the work and kept my body healthy throughout the training year. In order to feel prepared for a race, you would have to do your homework and put in the mileage – spend the time on your feet. Running is important to me, so yeah, you gotta do the training if you want to be able to compete. Being prepared for a race would fluctuate throughout the year, when I had more time to train I would be putting in the mileage that I needed to in order to show up to the race feeling confident. Throughout the year when I didn't have time to put in enough mileage, I would refrain from racing – I always wanted to show up to the race prepared. I would put in the bloody mileage so when I was standing on the start line, I would have the confidence to say “look, I can do this” and not be standing there thinking “oh jeeze, maybe I can't”.

Once you get into a long race and you're on empty you have to run with your head – knowing that you have prepared the way you needed to. What I always say is that “if you haven't done the homework, don't go to the start line. Marathons and long distance races are not something to be taken lightly; it's not a lark I don't care who you are, even as recreational runners make sure you've done the work. If you do go to the start line and during the race you blow up, whether it is a 5k, a 10k, or a marathon I mean, it's your own bloody fault, you didn't do the proper work and really, I guess it is a self-discipline thing. During different parts of the training year, you should be doing different things to ensure that you are prepared for your races.

After all, the race schedule is very independent. I can do whatever races I want, so I would always train in a certain way so I could peak for my races and show up prepared. During the winter months the preparation would dip, in the spring I would just run, and in the summer I would become a little bit more focused, in time to get prepared for my races. When the race day is getting closer, doing some intervals or hill repeats will help you to prepare. This always helps me to feel like I am properly trained for the race, this helps me to know in my mind that I am prepared. It's really whatever you need to do to feel prepared for that race – you gotta get out there and do it. When you get older, race prep is still something you have to focus on; it's true once you get into your mid 50's you start to slow down a little bit. I don't want to just go and do a race – if I can't run a decent time, I wouldn't want to race. I want to feel good and be in good shape before I go to race. It goes hand in hand with being competitive with me and also within my age group, I would like to be fit enough to do a decent time for my age group, you know.

When I was running in my younger years, I was highly competitive. I enjoyed seeing the gains that I was able to get and I liked to see myself improve as a runner. Now a day, I see myself in a little bit of a different position. Now, I am not only a runner or competitive runner, but I am a mature – masters runner, an ambassador, and a spokesperson. I see myself as an ambassador because I am in a position where I am able to promote the whole notion of running and hopefully encourage others to learn to love running the way that I did. I just try to promote the whole notion of trying to stay active. Through aging, I have had a shift in the way that I view myself as a runner. Now when I go to race it is sometimes a fun and recreational thing. I go to participate because it is a fundraiser for our community – and I always love to help out within our community. I have also shifted my focus. I no longer have the desire to race marathons, I would focus on shorter distances, but that has only been a change since I am no longer in my

50's – I've got nothing left to prove, I've done enough. Since I have been running for so many years, I know the other runners who are racing regularly. I am now also able to pick my races depending on what other racers are doing. These changes are definitely due to aging – the high level training has become harder to maintain over the years.

My age in relation to running becomes more evident the older that I get. I haven't been keeping up with the really intense training that I used to do, I haven't been doing it on a regular schedule, like I had in the past. I was around 40 the first time I realized that I was slowing down and once I hit my early 50's the slowdown was even more prominent. I was still able to perform well, especially in the age category, but my race times have definitely slowed down since I had my peak. This is hard – coming to terms with the fact that I don't have the peak power that I did before, but I don't. I can't go out and push it as hard as I did before, and it doesn't matter that I don't like it – I can't stop the age-related decline. Because I don't have the same peak power that I used to, my training has had to change. The way I approach hills within my training has changed – I no longer attack them, because I know that I will be paying for it later, if I did attack them I would be running on borrowed time. It's just something that I have to realize and be mindful of as I continue to age. In reality, I am no longer as competitive with the other racers in the race. I am focused on myself. I am competitive against myself and previous times that I have been able to run. I am competitive against the runner that I was the year before – I try to hold onto what I have and try not to let it slip too much each year. Even while I am training, I know that I am not able to run the same times that I did when I was younger and that's okay. I have come to terms with the fact that I am no longer able to improve on my times. I can't increase my fitness level past what it used to be.

Although for the most part running is an individual sport, however, the people that I surround myself with have had a huge influence on my journey as a runner. When I first started running, I was influenced by others. There were local running groups that would be out and about, running in facilities that I also went to! What sparked my interest in running was seeing other people do it. I had friends who were runners and they helped me get into it. I was also inspired by local runners who were doing laps and were out there hammering out the miles. One guy was always there running laps. Often, I had the chance to talk to him and he would tell me how far he was running. He was doing 8ks and more! I liked running but wow that was far! The local runners and local running groups were always very friendly and very welcoming. They invited me to run with them and this was a huge jump start on my journey as a runner. It was a positive experience for my early running years. Having a group to run with made all the difference; it kept me motivated and wanting to come back and run because there was a social aspect to it as well. Being able to go out on a run and talk with whomever else was there was really special. Surrounding yourself with people who are likeminded makes it much more enjoyable. Having people around who were more experienced was very helpful to have as I was just getting into running. I was able to seek advice from others who have been training and racing for many years. The advice they gave me ensured I was able to prepare myself for the journey, although I also had the space to make my own mistakes and, when I did, the experienced locals would once again offer advice and I would get back on track. The locals were welcoming even when it came to races. I was invited to train and travel to races with them, and this really sparked my interest. I was interested in the training that would have to go into it and I was interested in racing to see what I had in me. Family was also an avenue that provided social support, but this avenue was likely to change over time. As I got older, the social support I

received from family members was not something that I was relying on in order to maintain my adherence to my running program, although it was still nice to have the support from the people who are most important to me!

Running is something that is addictive, something that I always end up coming back to no matter what life throws at me. Running is a stable thing in my life; it is part of my regular schedule, something that helps to relieve stress. When I run, I get an endorphin release, this is probably a huge reason why runners always come back to running – it releases the feel good hormone and generally makes you feel good in life. Running can be very different for different people; it's one of those sports where you have to find what works for you and then continue to do that in order to be successful. I have found the kind of runs that I enjoy the most and that is what keeps me coming back. I am able to do the kind of running that I enjoy. I just enjoy running overall.

I keep coming back to running because it is the basis for my physical fitness. Staying active by running has allowed me to be active in other ways, such as yoga and cross country skiing. The root of my fitness is actually the running, yeah, I think it is important for people to just maintain their level of intensity. The fact that running is highly individual makes it easy to come back to. It is convenient and something that you don't need to rely on other people for, you can do it when you have the time! Seeing gains and my race times improving helps me to stay motivated. I keep coming back to running to see what my body is capable of doing. Remaining consistent with my training enables me to see physical gains throughout my journey. Due to my dedication to running and racing regularly – I have certificates coming out of my ying yang. Even when I had taken a year off I was able to come back to running – it's that feel good feeling you miss, there is something addictive about running. The people that I surrounded myself with

have also had a huge impact on why I continue to run. Having people who are likeminded around really does help! And with the weather getting nicer, I will get out more. Even with injuries, running is still easy to come back to, as long as you allow for the recovery process to take place and take the time your body needs to heal. Sometimes like you go for a few years and you really want to train a lot and then it tapers off and then it comes back – you get the urge to do some races again. You know life events or injuries just happen and stuff and you kind of lose your motivation and then it comes back. But you always come back, that's the important part! When you truly enjoy something it is easy to come back to!

Running is also very easy to come back to because it is so convenient. It is unlike any other sport with how convenient it is. To run, I don't have to go anywhere, I can just put my stuff on and I can run. It is quite easy actually. I am able to fit running into my schedule regardless of what else I may be doing. With work, I am always able to fit my running in, whether I run before work, during my lunch hour, or after work, I am always able to do it. Running was part of my day, every day. Running on the track is also convenient; the distance is right there for you and it's always accurate. Running track workouts was convenient because of the facilities that I had nearby. Even when on vacation, I was able to run. You name it, I could run; even on a cruise when you would think that you are limited with your free space, I could just run around the upper deck and still get in my running workouts. You can also always just go outside and run; you don't need to go to any facility or have any specific equipment, as long as you have a pair of shoes! Over the years, I have been running the same routes and this makes it really easy to track how far that I have run on any day. I can run a route and know my distance as my routes are perfectly measured out. Also, think about it, there are 24 hours in a day, surely to God I can

spend an hour of my time between running and a shower every day to keep myself in decent shape.

The health benefits I have gotten from running have been incredible and they have had a huge impact on my life. Even in my 50's I am still able to live an active life. I am not held back by physical limitations because I have kept up the physical intensity. This has allowed me to participate in many neat activities over the years. I am healthy, I don't need an oxygen tank, I don't need a walker, I am still able to get around and feel good. The health benefits go well beyond the physical gains and strength that you are able to reach through training. Running is great for my mental health as well; whether I like to admit it or not, running makes you feel good; maintaining that activity level helps. Running releases the feel good hormone. A lot of people don't realize that when we run, we have that endorphin release afterwards; it's that molecule that makes you feel good about what you are doing and gives you self confidence. So that's probably a big component of my mental health as well, it's just the fact that I've maintained that into my 50s. I feel good about myself and I feel good about life. Running has allowed me to feel that this way.

## **Discussion**

The similarities vignette provides insight into the commonalities that are shared among these three athletes throughout their running journeys in relation to their tactics, social relations, and motives. Although previously stated, some similarities also have different aspects to them. The following similarities are true among all three athletes. To provide a greater answer to the research question: How do leading competitor masters level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in? Similar tactics (sub-themes: training / racing smart – valuing rest, show up to a race prepared – do your homework, a



change in running identity, and again realizing age and athletic ability), social relations (sub-theme: spark of interest in running), and motives (sub-themes: keeps coming back to running, again: the convenience of running and, finally, the health benefits of running) have been expressed for clarity as they are unique to these master level leading competitors and they foster their ability to remain a member of the competitive long distance running social world and fulfil multiple identities over time.

### **Tactics**

Similar tactics to ensure their success when it came to long-distance running were expressed by all three athletes. These tactics included training / racing smart (valuing rest), showing up to a race prepared (doing your homework), a change in running identity that occurred in their later years, and the constant realization of their age and their athletic abilities as they change over time. Valuing rest is something that was seen throughout the duration of all three of the athlete's running journeys; rest is not something that could be overlooked or not incorporated, rest is what allows these athletes to remain healthy during their training. The desire to show up to a race prepared is a similar desire for all three of these athletes; they ensure that they put in the work and reach a level of fitness that they have deemed to be appropriate before entering a race and showing up at the start line. Each athlete went through a change in his running identity. All of these changes occurred later in life when they were faced with the age-related slowdown in their physical abilities. Finally, with all three of these athletes realizing their age and their athletic ability and understanding how it had been changing over time, they were able to adapt alongside the aging process in terms of their goals and physical potential.

**Training / racing smart (valuing rest).** As masters athletes, these athletes express the importance of incorporating rest into their training plan. Rest is incorporated on many different

levels; it was seen within the weekly training regimen, where they would take a day off to allow their body to recover, it was seen within a work-out when they talked about running intervals, and on a greater scale rest was seen after races and most importantly when their bodies needed it – regardless of what the training schedule dictated. Rest and work intervals were discussed as a means to reach a higher fitness level, leading them to their competitive race performance; the rest was highlighted as a short period of rest, a period they needed in order to attack the next interval. Rest was highly spoken about when they discussed their adherence to a training regimen. With their weekly training regimen, they highlighted the need for them to have a day within their week where they were able to have a rest from the intense training. This rest day was used as a ‘rest-set’ and was highly valued and viewed as an essential part of their training. Rest was viewed as something that was necessary in order to remain a healthy runner throughout their lifespan. The athletes talked about taking rest when it wasn’t planned, but they knew their bodies would be better off if they provided it with recovery time rather than work time – in terms of physical exertion.

**Show up to a race prepared (do your homework).** “The 26.2-mile race requires physical and mental stamina to successfully complete it” (Hamstra-Wright, Coumbe-Lilley, Kim, McFarland, & Huxel Bliven, 2013, p. 2828). All of the athletes in this study reinforced this literature. They all express the importance of showing up to a race prepared. This meant they had put in the required training mileage, were fit, and were mentally prepared for the race ahead of them. The common phrase to express this habit was the concept of ‘doing your homework’ and not going to the starting line of a race knowing they haven’t done the appropriate amount of training, leaving them in a loop of self-doubt and questioning their readiness. Training regimens that were unique to each athlete were each athlete’s main tactic to ensure that they would be

prepared for each race they registered for. In a previous study, “runners who reported incorporating tempo and interval runs, running more miles per week, and running more days per week... ran significantly faster than those reporting less tempo and interval runs, miles per week, and days per week” (Hamstra-Wright et al., 2013, p. 2828). For the athletes of this study, knowing in the back of their mind that they have incorporated the types of workouts necessary for them to be successful in a long-distance race, is sometimes enough to calm their nerves and allow them to feel prepared for the race that they are about to endure. This is another example where these athletes reinforced the literature and supported the notion of putting in the work and the variety of work necessary to be confident and prepared physically and mentally for the race ahead. “Training preparation had a significant influence on marathon performance” (Hamstra-Wright et al., 2013, p. 2828). Throughout their years of running, this was something they came to understand, and therefore put even more emphasis and drive behind their desire to be properly trained for the races they were going to endure, knowing that proper preparation is a key factor into a successful race.

**Change in running identity.** Once an athlete has established an athletic identity it is an identity that may be similar to any other identity that they may have also formed in the sense that it is “something which is shifting not fixed, chosen not given, and multiple not singular” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 6). All the athletes in this study reinforced the shifting and multiple literature (Dionigi, 2002). Similar to all three of these athletes, they reached a point in their running journey where they had a drastic change in their athletic identity and how they viewed themselves in relation to the sport of long distance running. In the early years of their running journey, they all identified themselves with some degree of an athletic identity. An athletic identity can be “undoubtedly a central source of self-worth for many individuals” (Brewer et al.,

1993, p. 345). These athletes supported the notion of an athletic identity being a central source of self-worth, because these athletes found great pride and value in their training regimen (Brewer et al., 1993). With the risk of such weight being placed on a single identity, the ability that these participants had to make the necessary alterations within their athletic identity that they had identified with for so many years was critical to the continuation of their athletic and life pursuits. This change in their athletic identities occurred later in life, once they had become master level athletes as defined by this project as being over the age of 50. Although individually the specific change in their identities differed from one another, the impact the change had on their ability to remain an active member in society with a positive mindset had been the same.

The changes in their identities of identifying as an ambassador, changing the race distance of choice due to age, and with a new focus on the recreational side of competitive running are all examples of different or additional “identities [being] produced, shaped, taken-up, or resisted” (Cosh et al., 2013, p. 90). “Identity management is the process in which older adults negotiate and construct a personal and social sense of self” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 5). This is the process that each athlete went through as they became a master’s level runner to ensure they were still desirable within the view that they had of themselves and where they would like to fit into the social community. To varying degrees, each athlete went through the process of identity formation once they became a master’s runner, whether they were adopting a new identity altogether or altering a pre-existing identity to better work for them. Identity formation is a dynamic process “requiring opportunities for self-expression and social feedback and ample room for revisions” (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991, p. 195). So, when these athletes adopted or altered their pre-existing identities, social feedback was something that assisted this process; this was also driven by a degree of social desirability. In order for identity formation to be successful,

which in the case for these three athletes, it was the new identity must have captured their attention as when this occurred the change in identity was “likely to transform the self in a meaningful way” (Klieber & Kirchnit, 1991, p. 196). Along with identity formation, each of these athletes has gone through the process of identity management; this occurred in a meaningful way to them, supporting the literature (Klieber & Kirchnit, 1991). This management process assisted in the changes that were visible within each of the athlete’s identity alterations. Within these changes and alterations with their identities, maintaining a competitive masters’ runner identity “can alter societal expectations of what it means to grow old” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 4).

**Realizing age and athletic ability.** A similarity between these athletes is their ability to realize their age and their athletic ability. This connection allows them to remain optimistic about their future potential, but also realistic with what is attainable for them throughout the duration of their running journey. In Dionigi and O’Flynn’s (2007) study they discovered that some of their participants “expressed embarrassment and guilt about being competitive in later life, but it did not stop them from competing or trying their hardest” (p.370). In relation to the athletes of this study, this concept was a divergence. The athletes in the present study did not allude to any feelings of embarrassment or guilt when it came to admitting their competitive attitude as a masters’ athlete; instead, they are still proud of their competitive attitude and of their ability to perform well in relation to others in their age group. Rather than justifying why they are still engaged with some level of competitive running, they discussed it openly without hesitation, and demonstrated no need to hide or avoid the topic of competitiveness later in life. Similar to aspects of Dionigi and O’Flynn’s (2007) results of their study, these athletes also “talked about: enjoying winning and breaking records; appreciating the medals, recognitions and status that

accompanied competition; and constantly monitoring their performance levels in comparison to their own previous standards and/or of others...” (p. 368). They talk about their accomplishments without feeling the need to “claim that their actions were not overly aggressive, violent, or about winning at all costs” (Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007, p. 376). Alluding to the concept of being a masters’ athlete and also remaining competitive is not something that they are ashamed about or feel the need to downgrade their appearance of competitiveness.

### **Social Relations**

Social relations were seen as a commonality among all athletes; they are inspired by other runners and their athletic identities are reinforced by others who shared a similar mindset in terms of their enjoyment of long distance running. Social relations for these athletes expands much past the initial connections that they formed with other more experienced runners and went into the relations within their families and with others that they have only a small specific connection with (e.g., the shoe repair man). Social relations expand to allow athletes to be integrated into a social world. In this case, these athletes were integrated into the social world of long distance running. The long distance running social world provides these athletes the opportunity “to interact, to socialize, to form new friendships, and to develop a strong sense of dedication and physical effort based on the mutual interests and identification” (Robinson et al., 2014, p. 379) with the sport. These athletes express the benefits of having social support from their families, but also discuss the importance of their main motivators being themselves and seeing family support as helpful but not necessary for their continuation to participate in sport (Dionigi et al., 2012). This supports the literature where the athletes treasure the social support that they receive from others, but the athletes also take it to another level and further describe that they are more so their main motivator for their own sport participation. It is inevitable that

with “voluntarily expos[ing] themselves to physical suffering through rigorous training, demanding schedules, and careful diets that extend[s] well beyond that required for general health and fitness... [that it may] open participants to a unique... and particular social world” (Robinson et al., 2014, p. 378). Social relations for these athletes are experienced on a broad scale. They have emphasized the importance of maintaining social relations with peers of their own age and also the desire and importance of maintain social relations with younger runners.

**Spark of interest in running.** Each of the athletes in this study has positive social relations in the initial stages of their running journeys. They all have described numerous positive interactions with other runners who had much more experience with the sport of long distance running than they did at the time. It was this positive experience that allowed them to smoothly integrate a running schedule into their lives. On many occasions, the athletes expressed their appreciation to the many other runners who had offered them guidance and reassurance along the way. Social relations enhance opportunities for individuals, especially when the social relations can help guide individuals just outside of their comfort zone so they are able to grow within themselves. It was the social influence on their spark of interest in running that allowed them the initial social support in their running journey. Throughout the duration of their running journey their social relations changed; certain social relations became more or less important as the things around the athlete evolved. Later in their lives, each athlete shares in the common idea that their families are supportive, even if it is indirectly. Whether their family is supportive by appreciating the fact that their father is healthy and able to participate alongside them in physical activities, or supportive by allowing them the time that was necessary to train and to travel with them to races, or supportive by appreciating that their father has found passion in a physical endeavor. These athletes express that they support the literature in the sense that the support they

receive from their friends and family is nice to have, but they do “not necessary rely on [the] social support from family members to maintain their participation in Masters sport” (Dionigi et al., 2012, p. 383).

### **Motives**

A common motive among all three athletes is their desire and ability to always come back to running, regardless of what obstacles are in their way for any duration of time; once they overcame the obstacle, they would get right back into their running regimen. The athletes express that returning to running is important to them. It is important to them on various different levels, whether it be because running is simply ingrained in their heads for so long that it is a part of who they were, a part of their identity from a younger age (Webb et al., 1998), or because they continue to have positive experiences with running, including positive health benefits. These health benefits range from physical to mental benefits; running is a way to keep their physical bodies moving and in good shape, but it is also a good way to relieve stress and to remain happy with life. A great motive to participate in the sport of long distance running is the health dividends that they are receiving (Shephard, Kavanagh, Mertens, Qureshi, & Clark, 1995). Long distance running “could be understood as a strategy for improvement in the emotional well-being domain, which is an essential component of overall mental-health” (Popov et al., 2019, p. 1). Whereas these athlete’s journeys didn’t begin due to the mental health benefits, these benefits were expressed as a positive experience within their running journey – a motive to keep them coming back to running.

**Keeps coming back to running.** Throughout each athlete’s running journey, they expressed times where their regular training schedule had to slow down, whether it was due to family or career obligations or due to injury. Following this they all expressed the fact that they



still had the desire to come back to running and eventually they did make the return. Depending on where they were in their running journey, these setbacks did influence how they came back to their training program; if the comeback was later in life, then they may have come back in a slightly different capacity, such as focusing on different race distances, but none the less they saw the importance of resuming their training for health, social, and other benefits. In their early years, a main driving force that allowed them to maintain such a strong desire to be re-integrated into their running program was the level of competitiveness that they had within; they were experiencing health benefits and becoming much stronger runners very quickly.

In their later years, they are motivated to return to running for a variety of different reasons, with more focus on the health benefits that they are receiving, and the fact that they still consider themselves to be healthy and fit. The action of coming back to running is a reciprocal relationship with a strong athletic identity that was developed by the participants. The strong athletic identity that was developed in their early years was a main driving force in their desire to withstand any obstacles to maintain that identity. While these athletes keep coming back to running, their training regimens and race times were changing over time due to age-related declines; but the involvement in sport encourages them to be in touch with their physical bodies and to continue to acknowledge their physical limits and accept how they may change over time (Dionigi, 2006a). Running is something that these participants all keep coming back to because it is able to provide them an avenue where they are able to “celebrat[e] later life as a period for enjoyment, good health, independence, vitality, exploration, challenge, productivity, creativity, growth, and development rather than solely focus[e] upon decline, disengagement, and hopelessness” (Dionigi, 2006a, p. 182). These athletes reinforce the notion of sport participation providing a positive experience to athletes as they age.

**Convenience of running.** Although explained within each of the athlete's vignettes, the shared idea surrounding the convenience of running is also highlighted in the similarities vignette. These participants chose running due to its ease; it is easy for them to tie up their running shoes and get out the door. At times within their running journeys, they expressed that there wasn't much else to it, it was a simple activity. Within the activity of running they are able to describe the liberating benefits and euphoric feelings. The convenience of running alongside the fact that it was something the athletes were always coming back to may be caused by the simple good feeling that they received from running in a short period of time - doing an activity that doesn't require much other than getting out the door and putting one foot in front of the other.

**Health benefits of running.** "It is widely supposed that regular physical activity confers substantial health dividends on the" (Shephard et al., 1995, p. 35) adult population. Long distance running fosters "improvement[s] in or maintenance of important health characteristics [that are] advantageous to sport performance [and] to functioning in everyday life, where various activities can be carried out with less fatigue, without restraint and limitations" (Kusy & Zielinski, 2015, p. 63). Being able to perform everyday activities is important to the aging population and their level of independence (Kusy & Zielinski, 2015). Each athlete describes the health benefits that they are receiving or that they have received over the course of their running journey as a positive aspect of running and a reason to adhere to their desire to continue to run; this reinforces the literature on health benefits and regular physical activity. Similarly to the participants in Baker et al.,'s study (2010), the athletes in the current study also perceive themselves as people who have 'social worth' due to their consistent efforts to preserve good health and reduce health care costs, further reinforcing the literature.

As these athletes go through their running journey while aging, the health benefits that they are receiving due to their running regimen become more apparent and even more appreciated. These athletes indirectly touched on the concept of the three selves: the ‘possible selves’, the ‘feared selves’, and the ‘preferred selves’ (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). They expressed the desire to remain healthy and independent into their later years, while emphasizing the importance of avoiding physical declines that would disable them in terms of their overall good health status and their independence as they grew older. With the dialogue surrounding both, where they would like to see themselves and the aspects of life that they are actively trying to avoid, they have highlighted their ‘preferred selves’ and expressed that these selves would be able to be reached and maintained due to their adherence to a running regimen and the fight to remain in good shape (may be partly due to alternate training). By reaching and then maintaining their ‘preferred selves’ they are more likely to describe easier transitions between life’s stages and to be at peace with their aging journey and how it may be affecting their sport (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006).

The fact that these athletes adhere to intense and vigorous training and racing practices (with alterations over time as they age) has led them to even “greater health benefits than other forms of physical activity” (Shephard et al., 1995, p. 35) would have. The health benefits that these athletes received due to their adherence to their running schedules has lead them to rate “their overall quality of life as much higher than that of their... peers” (Shephard et al., 1995, p. 36); they are able to recognize the differences in their current health status when comparing themselves to others of the same age. In addition to rating themselves as healthier than their peers “they also appeared to enjoy a substantial advantage of health relative to the general population” (Shephard et al., 1995, p. 38), which encourages them to continue their lifestyle.

“Moreover, masters athletes reach upper limits of human physical capacity” (Kusy & Zielinski, 2005, p. 57). The athletes in this study have reinforced many previous studies conducted on health benefits and physical activity. Presented above were some of the examples where they have reinforced what has been previously investigated and found.

### **Chapter Summary**

The chapter began with the methods that were used to present the results: creative non-fiction and portrait vignettes. Following the methods, the results from the first athlete were introduced, followed by a discussion section about those results. The same pattern of results and a discussion were repeated for all four of the vignettes. In the discussion sections, the themes and sub-themes were elaborated on and discussed in relation to the results and literature, making connections, and highlighting similarities and differences.

## **Chapter five: Conclusion**

The objective of the current study was to investigate the running journeys of leading competitor master level long distance runners to develop an understanding of their continued ability to remain a leading competitor amongst their peers. The research question that led this project was: How do leading competitor masters level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in? Presented next is a summary of the findings to this research question, followed by the application of the findings, then the limitations and future research directions, and the chapter is finished with the concluding remarks.

### **Summary of the Findings**

In regard to the research question, the study identified several tactics, social relations, and motives that the leading competitor master level runners used in order to continue to perform competitively amongst their peers. Among the athletes in this study, there were differences and similarities with their use of tactics, social relations, and motive, as well as how they influenced their personal running journey. A combination of tactics, social relations, and motives proved to be necessary in order for an athlete to remain competitive against their peers well into their journey as a master level athlete and, in this case, that was considered to be over the age of 50. Differences between the tactics, social relations and motives among these three athletes were investigated. Within tactics: their use of technology, how they chose to recognize their age alongside their athletic ability, the lack of a specific training plan, and even the use of a running book as the main source of guidance throughout the entirety of their running journey. For social relations, differences were seen within how their social aspect played a part in their initial spark of interest with running, their varying positive experiences as an active member of the running

community, and in how the athlete continues to give back to the running community. Finally, the differences within the motives that were seen among these athletes were expressed as how the athletes viewed the convenience of running and how they chose to fight the calendar and navigate their adherence to long distance running while they were experiencing the aging process. This study also identified tactics, social relations, and motives that were similar to all three of these leading competitor long distance runners. These convergences highlighted and emphasized the various ways that these athletes have been able to continue their running journey while navigating the aging process. The similarities in tactics were their ability to value rest, their desire to show up to the race prepared by doing their 'homework', they described a change in their running identity as they entered their journey as a master level athlete, and there were similarities in how they recognize their age alongside their athletic abilities. Within their social relations, there were similarities within their spark of interests in running and how others influenced the initial adherence to their running journey. Finally, similarities are seen within the motives that these athletes are using to stay connected with their running journey. The similarities were how they keep coming back to running regardless of adversities they may have face, the acknowledgment of the convenience of running, and the various mental and physical health benefits that they are able to describe due to their high levels of training and remaining physically active.

### **Applications**

First, this research could be used by younger runners who have the desire to continue to run and incorporate it as a part of their day-to-day schedule. This research could expose younger runners to the process of recovering from injury, the ability anyone possesses to always come back to running as a healthy activity or a competitive pursuit, to enjoy running as a lifelong sport

with no end date, and as well to open their eyes to the potential adversity they may face, but with the encouragement that is needed to overcome that adversity. Although injury and the recovery process is highly individualized, with the investigation surrounding leading competitors process of recovery from injury exposed, the younger generation of runners is able to learn from others' previous experiences and may be able to find the worth behind the fight to recover from an injury and to reintegrate themselves into the running community.

Younger athletes are also able to witness the ability to return to running at any point in their lives; long distance running is something that individuals can always come back to due to its convenience and the lack of equipment required. Physical gains were seen within any of the three types of masters runners, whether they were 'serious lifetime runners', 'born-again master runners' or 'new-to-the-sport masters runners' (Pfitzinger & Latter, 2015). Within the results of this study, the adversity that these leading competitor master level long distance runners faced and overcame was expressed and investigated as a tactic they used to help them remain competitive within their age-group. This can provide younger runners with the opportunity to learn about other runner's journeys and gain insights.

Second, to the general population, this research has exposed the ability of athletes to enjoy running as a life-long activity, that can help individuals remain independent and to experience longevity in their own lives. The results of this study also express the many health benefits, both physical and mental, that the commitment to running has allowed these athletes to describe. Although these athletes adhere to a high demand of training, the health benefits can be visible even if an individual runs to a lesser degree of commitment.

Finally, to other leading competitors or competitive runners, this research may open their eyes to the journeys and ways of managing their identities as they describe many avenues of life.

The results of this study expressed how identity management is a critical process to endure in order to maintain multiple identities over time. This is seen when the athletes navigate their athletic identity, amongst family and career identities and roles. With other competitive runners being exposed to the possibility of following their athletic dreams as well as any career and family roles they wish to fill, maybe more athletes will choose to continue with their sport and incorporate it into their everyday life's roles.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

In this section, limitations of the current research study will be expressed, followed by the future research directions. This project set out to expand the knowledge that is currently available surrounding competitive masters level long distance runners. This research project expands the knowledge of master level runners on a new level, by defining the master athlete as someone who is over the age of 50, due to the realization that it is at this age where individuals are usually met with physical declines. Although this project only offers an insight on the tactics, social relations, and motives as the driving factors for master (50+) level runners, this limitation should not overshadow the information that has been gained through this study and therefore it can be used by athletes at various points in their lives. This limitation should act as a reference point for future research surrounding the master level long distance runner.

A second limitation inhibiting this research project was my lack of experience. This was the first endeavour the researcher had been on in terms of qualitative research from start to finish; it was a learning curve throughout the whole process. With the lack of experience conducting interviews and with the thematic analysis process, time therefore became a limitation. Time restraints were tight due to competing time demands from full-time work, training and racing as a varsity runner, as well as the time restraints of others with whom this project



incorporated. More experience and a longer time frame for completion would be an asset to a future research project.

The stories shared in this research are essential to expanding the understanding of the process of becoming and maintaining the ability to run at the level of a leading competitor while being classified as a masters athlete (over the age of 50). There are future areas of research that can be conducted to further increase the understanding of the running journeys these leading competitor master level runners go on and how they overcome adversity and remain motivated and inspired throughout the years. Further research on other areas of the running journey other than their tactics, social relations, and motives, would expand the knowledge base and increase the understanding of how these master level athletes maintain their competitive edge. There is a lot that can be learned through research with this population.

This research was only conducted using males as the leading competitor master level runners of interest. Future researchers may want to investigate the running journeys of female leading competitor master level athletes as well or in a project where females are the main focus. By researching female leading competitor master level runners, researchers may be able to find differences and similarities between males and females in relation to the tactics, social relations, and motives they use to remain competitive. Additional information may also be uncovered about how the different identities (e.g., family roles) of males and females influence their abilities to adhere to an athletic identity.

Finally, this research investigates the various social roles that were important to a masters athlete at various points in time. Further investigations on the social relations that encourage a life time runner throughout their running journey over time may prove to be beneficial, due to the simple fact humans are very social. Additional research on the social relations may uncover

other areas in the runner's journey where social relations had been a great asset or potentially a downfall to their running journey.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, this study provided insight into the unique running journeys of three of Sudbury's leading competitor master level runners. This study showcases the various tactics, social relations, and motives that were used in similar and in different ways among these three master level runners. Gaining a better understanding of the means of becoming and remaining a leading competitor while navigating the aging process, allows others to follow suit and to relate to these descriptions and journeys of others who have navigated those specific life course actions before them. Researchers should continue to explore the different variables within the life of a masters' level runner to gain more in depth information pertaining to specific life courses and athletic journeys.

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## **Appendix A: Laurentian University Research Ethics Board Approval Form**

**APPROVAL FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Research Ethics Board – Laurentian University

This letter confirms that the research project identified below has successfully passed the ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB). Your ethics approval date, other milestone dates, and any special conditions for your project are indicated below.

TYPE OF APPROVAL / New X / Modifications to project / Time extension	
<b>Name of Principal Investigator and school/department</b>	Jenny Bottomley, supervisor Robert Schinke, Human Kinetics, Michel Lariviere and Kerry McGannon, (HK) co-investigators
<b>Title of Project</b>	Leading Competitor Masters Runners: Identities and the Road to Success
<b>REB file number</b>	6016105
<b>Date of original approval of project</b>	January 14, 2019
<b>Date of approval of project modifications or extension (<i>if applicable</i>)</b>	
<b>Final/Interim report due on:</b> <i>(You may request an extension)</i>	January 14, 2020
<b>Conditions placed on project</b>	

During the course of your research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to the Research Ethics website to complete the appropriate REB form.

All projects must submit a report to REB at least once per year. If involvement with human participants continues for longer than one year (e.g., you have not completed the objectives of the study and have not yet terminated contact with the participants, except for feedback of final results to participants), you must request an extension using the appropriate LU REB form. In all cases, please ensure that your research complies with Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS). Also please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence with the REB office.

Congratulations and best wishes in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rosanna Langer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rosanna Langer, PHD, Chair, *Laurentian University Research Ethics Board*

## Appendix B: Recruitment Script



### Appendix B: Recruitment Script for Masters Level Leading Competitor Long Distance Runners

#### Leading Competitor Masters Runners: Identity and the Road to Success

I, Jenny Bottomley (Laurentian University) would like to invite you to be a part of my thesis project!

Committee members: Dr. Robert Schinke (supervisor), Dr. Kerry McGannon, Dr. Michel Larivière

Our project is about hearing your experiences as a long distance runner throughout your life as well as your experiences as a long distance runner as a masters athlete (age 50+). We will discuss your life path with a focus on your journey with long distance running. The focus will be placed on your athletic identity amongst other identities (ex. Career and family related) while training at a leading competitor level in the sport of long distance running (half and full marathon distances). We are trying to find stories that teach us more about this question:

- 1) How do leading competitor masters level long distance runners describe their life as a runner, in relation to today, and the context they are training in?

If you want to participate in the study there are three things that we will ask you to do. The first task is to complete a demographic questionnaire, this questionnaire is made up of questions that will help to classify and group the data collected. The second task we will ask you to do is to participate in a conversational interview with myself, Jenny, about your experiences as a leading competitor long distance masters runner and tell them stories that can address these three topics: (a) tell me about your journey as a runner in your community; (b) tell me about how the different roles in your life have played a part in your identity (family and career obligations). The third task is to participant in another

conversational interview held at a later date, the topic of interest during this interview will be focused on a snapshot of yourself as a masters level runner, we will be discussing topics that address the question of: (a) tell me how you balance your identities as a masters level runner (including the importance of your athletic identity). A conversational interview is an interview style where there is not a set of questions that will be answered, but there are guiding ideas that we will discuss with the main focus on the participant sharing their stories. To help facilitate each conversational interview, we ask each participant to bring in the most meaningful object that would assist you in telling your unique story; this object is free to be whatever you would like (e.g., shoes, a race bib, a piece of clothing, a medal, etc.). The demographic questionnaire and conversational interviews do not have any time restrictions, you as a co-participant, will have the flexibility to guide and structure the interviews, as it is your story that you will be telling. We would like to audio tape these tasks, but we will ask you before we start if this is ok. If you decide you would rather not be audiotaped then the researcher will be taking notes during your conversation.

Our goal with this project is to use the lessons I learn from you to better understand the unique identities that leading competitor masters level long distance runner population use to balance their life's responsibilities.

If you want to take part in this project please email or call myself at:

[JBottomley@laurentian.ca](mailto:JBottomley@laurentian.ca)

**705-675-1151 ext. 1331**

You may also contact the Laurentian University Research Officer at the Laurentian University Research Office, telephone: 705-675-1151 ext. 2436 or toll free at 1-800-461-4030 or email: [ethics@laurentian.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentian.ca) if you have any concerns pertaining to this project, the conduct of the researchers, and or/ the integrity of

this project. You may also contact the project's supervisor: Dr. Robert Schinke at 705-675-1151 ext 1045, 2151.

**Thank You!**

## Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire



### Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your full name?

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2. Date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

4. At what age did you begin to run? \_\_\_\_\_

5. At what age(s) did you start training for long distance running? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years of experience do you have in the sport of long distance running?

---

7. What is your highest level of education?

- High school
- College
- Bachelors Degree
- Graduate Degree

○ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. What are your athletic accomplishments as a long distance runner?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

9. What are your athletic accomplishments as a master level (age 50+) long distance runner?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

10. List any previous or ongoing injuries and briefly describe the impact they have had on your long distance running career.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



11. How many hours of training do you spend each day? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Informed Consent



### Appendix D: Leading Competitor Masters Runners Informed Consent Form

#### Informed Consent

**Study Title:** Leading Competitor Masters Athletes: Identities and the Road to Success

**Investigator:** Jenny Bottomley

**Committee Members:** Dr. Robert Schinke (Supervisor) , Dr. Kerry McGannon, and Dr. Michel Larivière

**Study Purpose:** This project is looking to better understand how leading competitor masters athletes balance their identities throughout their life, with a focus on a snapshot in time in their years as a masters (age 50+) athlete. The purpose is to better understand how you see yourself as an athlete and how this may have changed overtime. What we learn from this project will provide knowledge and insight on the similarities leading competitor masters athletes experience and how their view of themselves as an athlete changes overtime. The view you have of yourself as an athlete will be considered on two different levels: throughout your life and the snapshot in time as a masters athlete.

**Research Objective:** Our goal is to try and better understand how you as a masters athlete have balanced your identities in the past as well as how you continue to balance them in your current situation. We are trying to do this by asking you to share stories that can address these three topics: (a) tell me about your journey as a runner in your community; (b) tell me about how the different roles in your life have played a part in your identity (family and career obligations); and

(c) tell me how you balance your identities as a masters level runner (including the importance of your athletic identity).

**Benefits:** This project will give you a chance to tell your stories of being a leading competitor masters level long distance runner. No individual stories will be shared outside the research team, but the lessons we learn from your stories will provide other competitive athletes an opportunity to look into their future as an athlete. The information from your stories will be used to develop themes that are common amongst leading competitor masters athletes. These themes will allow other athletes to gain a better understanding of how masters athlete's experience their athletic identity at various stages in their life, and then again with a focus once they have become a masters level athlete (age 50+).

**Risks:** There is very little risk for you in this study.

**Project Demands:** If you agree to take part in this project, we will ask you to do three tasks.

1. Demographic Questionnaire: a questionnaire asking about the years of experience you have in the sport of long distance running, your highest level of education, your athletic accomplishments as a long distance runner and specifically as a master level runner (age 50+), and to touch on any previous or ongoing injuries that you may have had as well as the impact they had on you as an athlete.
2. Conversational Interview One: An interview with the primary researcher where you will be asked to share stories about your experiences as a long distance runner that have occurred over your lifetime.
  - a. This interview has no minimum or maximum time restrictions, as it is open for you to share your stories.

- b. This interview may take place in one of Laurentian University's library rooms, or in the Qualitative lab at Laurentian University, where you as the participant is most comfortable.
    - c. This interview will also be audiotaped to ensure no details are missed.
  3. Conversational Interview Two: This interview will take place one - two (1-2) weeks after the initial interview. The focus of this interview is on your current experiences as a masters level runner (age 50+).
    - a. This interview has no minimum or maximum time restrictions
    - b. This interview may take place in one of Laurentian University's library rooms, or in the Qualitative lab at Laurentian University.
    - c. This interview will also be audiotaped to ensure no details are missed.
  4. Bring your most meaningful object
    - a. For **each** of the interviews we ask you to bring your most meaningful object that will help tell your story
    - b. Interview one will require your most meaningful object to help share your history of running and interview two will require your most meaningful object to help share your current story, requiring a current meaningful object
    - c. With your permission, a photo will be taken of the object you bring, if this object is unable to be used due to identifying factors or we were not granted permission to use the photograph, a description of the object may be included in the final write-up.

**Right to Withdraw from the Project:** If you feel uncomfortable about sharing any personal experiences during any part of the research, you can stop at any time. If after the conversation,

you feel there are any parts to your story that you do not want to be shared outside of the room you can ask the researcher to remove that part of the story from the interview. You can decide not to participate in this project at any time without penalty or consequence. You simply need to tell the researchers in person, call, and/or email the researcher that you do not wish to be a part of the study anymore; your wishes will be respected and supported. If you wish to not continue at any time, the data that was collected during your interview will be destroyed immediately following your request.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality:** The conversational interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed (typed up into a written copy of the conversation). If you wish to not be audiotaped please let the researcher know before you begin your interview. Any information that identifies you will not be shared outside of the research committee, making sure others cannot connect you with your story. You will be given a code name and a number such as “Participant 1”. Your name and location of your interview will be removed from the typed-up copy of your interview. The only people who will be able to read your full stories are the researchers involved in the project.

**Data Storage:** All the data (stories) collected during the project will be kept on an encrypted hard drive that will be kept by the main researcher. Consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in the project coordinator’s office. All collected data will be kept until five years after the project is finished (2023). When this five year time line is finished, electronic data will be deleted by the lead researcher from her computer and storage device. In addition, all information you share and wish to remain confidential will not be included as data in the project.

If you have any questions about the study or whether you can or should be a participant in this project, you can contact me at:

[JBottomley@laurentian.ca](mailto:JBottomley@laurentian.ca)

**705-675-1151 ext. 1331**

You may also contact the Laurentian University Research Officer at the Laurentian University Research Office, telephone: 705-675-1151 ext. 2436 or toll free at 1-800-461-4030 or email: [ethics@laurentian.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentian.ca) if you have any concerns pertaining to this project, the conduct of the researchers, and or/ the integrity of this project. You may also contact the project's supervisor: Dr. Robert Schinke at 705-675-1151 ext 1045, 2151.

I agree to participate in this study. I have had all the questions I have answered and I have received a copy of this consent form:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Signature of Participant                      Date

I agree to participate in this study. I have had all the questions I have answered and I have received a copy of this consent form. I agree for my interview to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Signature of Participant                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher                      Signature of Researcher                      Date

## **Appendix E: Interview Question**



### **Appendix E: Interview Question**

#### **Leading Competitor Masters Runners: Identities and the Road to Success**

My data collection method is a demographic questionnaire, followed by a conversational interview. Due to the conversational interview giving power to the participant to tell their own story, I will open the interview with the grand tour question of: “Tell me about your life as a runner...”.