8-2000

The experience of a first race: a phenomenological description

Karen M. Appleby

Recommended Citation

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Karen M. Appleby entitled "The experience of a first race: a phenomenological description." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Human Performance and Sport Studies.

Craig A. Wrisberg, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Joy T. DeSensi, Mark Hector
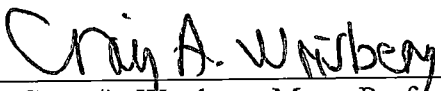
Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council.

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Karen M. Appleby entitled "The Experience of a First Race: A Phenomenological Description." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Human Performance and Sport Studies

Craig A. Wrisberg
Dr. Craig A. Wrisberg, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance·

Joy T. DeSensi
Dr. Joy T. DeSensi

Mark Hector
Dr Mark Hector

Accepted for the Council.

signature
Interim Vice Provost and
Dean of The Graduate School

The Experience of a First Race: A Phenomenological Description

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Karen M Appleby

August, 2000

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents. Peg and Drew Appleby Mom and Dad, through your consistent support and encouragement and your unwavering faith in both my choices and my abilities, you have helped me find something that I truly love and am excited about. I can't think of a better support system to have in my life than the two of you, my best friends

This is also dedicated to Sam, my future husband and life partner Without you I would have never started carving this path. Your patience, acceptance, and support of me for the past seven years has enabled me to reach heights I would have never expected You inspire me on an everyday basis with your creativity, talent, energy, motivation, and desire to fulfill our dreams together We're on our way.

Finally this work is dedicated to all of the athletes who are embarking on their quests toward competing in any event for the first time. First time competitive experiences can be scary, intimidating, and confusing. I hope that the results of this work will prepare you enough so that your first experiences are enjoyable, exciting, and successful

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank each one of my committee members, Dr Craig Wrisberg, Dr Joy DeSensi, and Dr. Mark Hector, for guiding me through the process that led me to this enlightening research experience.

Dr. Wrisberg Thank you for opening your arms to me and accepting me into this wonderful program. As the first teacher I had in graduate school, I was in awe of your research expertise. The completion of this project only further enhanced my respect and admiration for the work to which you are so diligently committed. This project has led me to further understand your passion and think that I, too, might one day want to pursue similar research adventures.

Dr DeSensi Thank you for consistently supporting me through two years of graduate school. Thank you for opening my eyes to so many things in myself and in my world to which I have ignored and written off as "just the way it is " Thank you for your encouragement, your support, your honesty, your passionate teaching, your hard work, and your commitment to your students. Thank you for helping me become the woman that I knew I could and will become.

Dr Hector. Thank you so much for your interest in my work and this program. Your class last summer was one of the most wonderful classroom experiences I have had I appreciated your challenge to put ourselves within the context of the class, that's when learning starts to happen Thank you for introducing me to and teaching me about phenomenology and its wonderfully rich potential Most importantly, thank you for teaching me how to discipline my dog—it works (sometimes)!

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of novice runners during their first competitive race. While the participants in this study had never run a competitive race before, they had run consistently on their own (i.e at least ten miles a week prior to the race) In order to obtain a description of the participants' experiences, a phenomenological approach was employed. The phenomenological paradigm acknowledges the participant as the expert on the phenomenon at hand. Therefore, the interview allowed the participants the freedom to accurately tailor the discussion to describe their experience Each interview was audiotaped and lasted approximately thirty-five minutes Five themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the transcribed interviews These themes were: (a) <u>Others</u> (and how <u>Others</u> were experienced through Others as Motivation, Comparing Self to Others, and Perceptions of Experienced Others), (b) <u>Personal Meaning</u> (and how <u>Personal Meaning</u> became apparent through Accomplishment, Positive Experience, and Trying Harder), (c) <u>Temporality</u> (and how <u>Temporality</u> was experienced through Starting Too Fast, Pace, and Slow time), (d) <u>Surprise and Unfamiliarity</u> (and how <u>Surprise and Unfamiliarity</u> was experienced through Energy After the Race and Race Paraphernalia); and (e) <u>The Body</u> (and how <u>The Body</u> was perceived through Preparing the Body, Mental Strategies, and Physical Discomfort) These themes characterized the participants' experiences that became figural against the ground of a first race The results of this study suggest several applications for novice competitors and for coaches These include the importance of anticipating various aspects of the event and preparing for them as well as obtaining social support from others

Table of Contents

Table

Chapter 1

Introduction

Sport psychologists have examined the competitive, cognitive processes of athletes for many years. What do athletes think about during their events? What thoughts promote peak performances? Do cognitive processes limit performances? The answers to these questions can be extremely valuable to athletes, coaches, and sport psychologists For example, studies show that many experienced athletes use internal forms of imagery (Rotella et al 1980), have lower cognitive and somatic anxiety levels compared to less experienced athletes before competition (Mahoney & Avener, 1977), and use dissociative strategies during aerobic training to get through workouts (Wrisberg & Pein, 1990) Understanding the mental techniques used in competition and training and the stress levels of athletes before a competition, add insight into the world of the athlete By being conscious of these occurrences, the researcher, coach, and sport psychologist should be able to provide more effective support and assistance for both experienced and non-experienced performers

A thorough review of the sport and exercise psychology literature reveals that no research has been conducted on the experience of novice competitors. While most experienced athletes have developed effective mental and emotional strategies for competition, it is likely that it took them many years of practice to achieve these desired results In the current study, an attempt was made to begin to describe the experience of novice racers This experience is crucial to these individuals and represents a valid element of competition. Among other things, such experiences offer valuable insight into

how and why athletes are motivated to begin and continue their competitive athletic experience.

A pertinent issue to understanding the experience of novice competitors is the definition of a novice competitor Who is the novice competitor and how are his/her experiences different from elite and/or experienced athletes? Elite athletes are defined as athletes who have had successful competitive experiences, while non-elite athletes are commonly categorized as individuals who have had sufficient amounts of competitive experience but have achieved less success than their elite counterparts (Mahoney & Avener, 1977; Rotella et al., 1980, Newcombe & Boyle, 1995; Frazier 1987; Eklund, 1994) Novice athletes are defined as those athletes who have had less competitive experience than their elite and non-elite counterparts (McPherson, 2000). Novice competitors are individuals who are in training but have never competed To date, no research on such individuals has appeared in the sport psychology literature

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to begin to understand the competitive experience of runners who participated in their first organized, competitive race The specific research question that this study addressed was. What is the experience of a first race like for a novice competitor?

Significance of the Study

Those who should benefit most from this study are the athletes who participated in the study These athletes had a chance to reflect upon their first race experience by describing it to me This, in turn, made them conscious of the aspects of that experience that may have facilitated or debilitated their performances These runners may then

employ this knowledge when running additional races   Additionally, benefits may exist

for other novice competitive runners who are embarking on their own personal quests

toward competing in their first race. By being more aware of the various mental,

emotional, and physical phenomenon of a first race, novice competitors may be able to

prepare better for their first race

Another group who may benefit from this research is coaches. In order to assist

athletes in performing optimally, every coach needs to understand their athletes'

experiences. Therefore, coaches who coach novice runners may benefit from this study

by gaining an understanding of these athletes' experiences

Operational Definitions

The following three operational definitions were used in this study: 1. A

competitive race is an organized running race in which runners come together to compete

over a 3.1-mile course for awards 2   An experienced competitor is any runner who has

competed in a competitive running race of any distance, and 3   A novice competitor is

any runner who trains at least ten miles per week who has never participated in a

competitive running race.

Assumption of the Study

The following assumption was relevant to this study the athletes who participated

articulated their experiences as accurately and honestly as possible.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitation applied to this study Interviews were conducted after

different races. Four of the participants participated in the same race, while the other

three participated in three different races   As a result of running in different races, it is

possible that the participants may have perceived their experiences differently. Every

participant, however, ran the same distance, and was interviewed within the same time

frame (i.e. one-week after the race)

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Both the scholarly and professional literature has enriched our understanding of runners and their experience of training and competition. In this chapter, I will discuss the literature that is pertinent to both of these topics and explain why I decided to use a phenomenological approach to gather data. Specific topics addressed in this review include the definition of "athletes," the benefits of qualitative inquiry and the phenomenological paradigm, the process of preparing for first races, and research on competitive experiences, coping strategies, anxiety and its effect on competition, and athletes' thoughts during competition.

The research on the competitive experience of athletes is quite extensive. The current literature offers the reader a comprehensive understanding of the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of both elite and non-elite athletes when they compete. This research, however, is devoid of information regarding the first time competitive experience of novice athletes.

For athletes, coaches, and other sport practitioners to fully understand the competitive experience, the pure novice competitor's experience needs to be described. This athlete may hold the key to understanding the athlete as a person instead of an object who is subjected to rigorous training and racing to reach high levels of performance in competition. (Berger & Mackenzie, 1980)

Athletes: The Elite/Non-Elite Dilemma

A widely agreed upon operational definition of elite and non-elite competitors currently is missing from the literature Elite competitors have been variously defined as male Olympic gymnasts (Mahoney & Avener, 1977), members of the U.S Olympic Ski Team (Rotella, Gansneder, Ojala, & Billing, 1980), athletes who have achieved success at either the state or the national level (Newcombe and Boyle, 1995), men who run marathons under 2 hours and 45 minutes and women who run marathons in under 3 hours and 5 minutes (Frazier, 1987), and members of a collegiate wrestling team (Eklund, 1994)

The Non-elite competitors have usually been categorized as lower achieving athletes from the categories stated above (i.e. non-Olympic team members, those who have not achieved a certain level of success at either the state or national level, those who do not run marathons in under a certain time, and those who are not members of a certain collegiate team.) The definitions of novice athletes in the sport psychology literature have been confined to beginning athletes who are already competitive in their sports (e g., McPherson, 2000). The novice competitor, or the athlete who has trained for a particular sport but has never competed, however, is not represented in the literature. The absence of a consistent definition of "athlete" poses a problem for those who are interested in understanding the cognitions of athletes of different skill levels. Increased knowledge of the novice competitor's experience should serve to alleviate the problem

The Benefits of Qualitative Inquiry

In order to describe the experience of the novice athlete, a qualitative, or more specifically a phenomenological, approach was used in this study. The importance and

relevance of the phenomenological paradigm to the sport psychology literature has been addressed by Dale (2000), Johnson (1998), Dale (1996), Berger & Mackenzie (1980), and Quinn (1980) These authors all contend that a phenomenological approach describes human experience in an accurate and meaningful manner

Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that enables the researcher to understand the whole experience of the athlete, while also providing a greater understanding of how the individual "interprets" his or her world (Cote, Salmela, Abderrahim, & Russel, 1993). Qualitative research of this type allows the researcher to gain a richer more developed appreciation for the complex interactions that construct and define an experience for the participant (Strean, 1998). By becoming familiar with an individual's understanding of his/her own world, I attempted to relive the experience with the individual While the information I gathered through this process may not be generalizeable to the entire running community, it should provide insight into the personal, individual experiences of a group of novice competitors and thereby offer an enlightened understanding of the phenomenon of running a first race (Krane, Anderson, & Strean, 1997)

Maxwell (1996) has suggested that quantitative methodology, with its emphasis on observable behavior, may lead to a limited view of the phenomenon being studied By simply quantifying the discernible behavior that accompanies an activity, one may actually trivialize the behaviors of the participants by reducing them to a single measure of central tendency (e g mean, median, or mode). While quantitative evaluation may provide an accurate portrayal of what seemingly goes on in a competitive situation, it does not take into account the lived experience of the individuals in the situation

Qualitative research, if conducted within a valid framework, can provide a rich

understanding of the phenomenon as it takes into account the feelings and emotions of

the participants (Klein, 1982) In qualitative research, validity can be achieved in many

ways. According to Glesne (1999, p. 32), the major steps that must be taken in order to

increase validity include prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation

or the use of multiple sources of data and analysis, peer review and debriefing, negative

case analysis, clarification of the researcher bias (i e. bracketing), member checking, rich,

thick description, and external auditing. Meticulous recognition and use of the

participant's words to describe the experience is also an essential tool for improving the

validity of qualitative research (Krane et. al, 1997)

In summary, qualitative research is an excellent method for understanding

and describing the thoughts, feelings, and actions of participants in a natural setting and

can lead to a rich understanding of the context in which a participant is immersed The

best way to fully understand the participant's experience is to take into account the

physical and social contexts that define their world in that particular situation at that

particular time.

Why Phenomenology?

Traditional research approaches (e g. surveys, controlled experiments, etc.) are

guided by a goal of explaining why a phenomenon has occurred as opposed to how it is

experienced. Using the traditional approach, the researcher must delineate certain

behaviors (create a hypothesis) that he/she defines as "evidence" that a certain

phenomenon is actually occurring (Valle & Halling, 1989). Searching for these

behaviors presumably results in a cause-effect relationship between human and world

(i.e world creates a situation and human responds). As an alternative to the cause-effect approach to research, a phenomenological approach affirms the idea that human and world coexist. Heideggar (1962) coined the term "being-in-the-world" to represent this coexistence

Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997, p. 9) described Heideggar's philosophy in athletic terms when they stated that "the athlete speaks from a first-person perspective in which body, will, and outcome are experienced as a single, unified event." In order for the athlete and his/her world to coexist, it is essential that one or the other take a figural role in the relationship. In the athletic experience, the world, defined in this case as the race situation, provides the ground for the runner's experience. In order to explore this figure/ground relationship more fully the researcher must ask the question " how does the world—the [race] situation—regulate [the runner's] actions?" (Pollio, et. al , 1997, p 9).

Phenomenological research is also grounded in the theory of situational freedom Because humans can never be separate from their respective "worlds," they are never fully free from them Situational freedom, as described by Valle and King (1978), however, acknowledges a variable amount of "freeness" within a certain context Situational freedom is a person's ability to choose his or her own environmental limitations (Johnson, 1998). If, for example, an individual is asked to choose between going running and working on his/her thesis, and they choose to run, that individual is not free to sit at his/her computer and describe situational freedom. Therefore, this individual is limited to the situational context of running even though he/she chooses that action. The individual would, in actuality, be choosing his/her own environmental constraints

Traditionally, the field of sport psychology has produced research that has failed to gain an understanding and appreciation of the athlete's experience (Strean, 1998) Phenomenology, therefore offers the researcher the unique opportunity to describe and understand athletes' experiences under the guidance and direction of the athletes themselves The phenomenological interview involves no pre-constructed questions but rather allows the participant to guide the dialogue and direction of the interview. This freedom provides the athletes the opportunity to describe their situations and experiences freely (Dale, 1996). Phenomenology does not seek to distill an experience as a "thing in the world " Rather, it is the goal of phenomenology to begin to describe how the experience is integrated into the world of the participant (Johnson, 1998).

This phenomenological philosophy guides the present study. Participant description presumably allowed a better understanding of the racing phenomenon and those thoughts, feelings, and actions that novice racers experienced in their first competitive race

First Races

Very little has been written about the first race experience of novice competitors. Harmon (1989) chronicled the path of a novice racer from his training schedule to the completion of his first race The first competitive running experience was marked by anxiety of the unknown, pain, thoughts of incompetence and quitting, consciousness of other racers, and post-race euphoria.

In Eck's (2000) *Beginning Racing Guide*, experts such as Bob Williams, Jack Daniels, and Ed Eyestone, all of whom are elite runners and coaches, offered advice to novice runners concerning their first race. These tips ran the gamut from how to warm

up to proper racing etiquette. Eck, however, failed to include the perspective of novice

runners in this article. Thus it is possible that what may be figural to elite, successful

athletes and coaches may not be applicable to the novice competitor during his or her first

race.

<h2 style="text-align:center"><u>The Competitive Experience</u></h2>

There is an abundance of both qualitative and quantitative studies that have

examined athletes' competitive experiences. Athletes defined as "elite," "non-elite,"

"successful," "unsuccessful," and "novice" have been categorized according to their

performance outcomes and mental strategies during competitive events During

successful competition, elite athletes often report positive mental characteristics such as

self-confidence, absorption into the activity, relaxation, control, and flow (Eklund, 1994;

Garfield & Bennet, 1984). Flow is described as a mental state in which engagement in

the activity is so strong that everything else is inconsequential (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

Unfortunately competition can also prompt feelings of distraction, low self-confidence,

and negative thoughts. (Eklund, 1994).

Successful, elite athletes also appear to possess more positive mental health states

than their less-successful counterparts (Newcombe & Boyle, 1995). Positive mental

health is characterized in competitive sport by low amounts of tension, depression, anger,

and confusion. Positive mood states make it easier for athletes to overcome negative

physical states (e.g. increased lactate levels) during competition Successful, experienced

athletes who display these positive characteristics are more likely to view pain in a

rational, objective manner and do not view pain and discomfort as deterrents to the

competitive experience (Brewer & Sachs, 1996).

Some researchers have examined the specific thoughts of athletes during competition (Dale, 2000; Eklund, 1994; Morgan, 1978, Mahoney & Avener, 1977) Main themes that characterize the mindset of successful elite wrestlers, for example, include the feeling that an opponent is wearing down in a match, confidence even when losing, likelihood of total immersion, and being focused but not overly so Thoughts that plague less-successful athletes include thoughts of previous losses, lack of focus, fatigue, excessive aggression, holding back, and an inability to follow strategy (Eklund, 1994) Such mindset variations may also offer insight into the difference between successful and unsuccessful competitors

Athletes who have had very little competitive experience tend to experience negative thoughts during competition (McPherson, 2000). Compared to their more experienced counterparts, beginning tennis players note that they react with little planning during competition, set fewer goals before, during, and after competition, commonly engage in task-irrelevant thoughts, experience negative thoughts about their desire to compete, and commonly self-articulate negative internal statements during competition (McPherson, 2000). These mostly negative experiences often made competition a less desirable activity for the beginning competitor.

Coping Strategies of Athletes

In order to understand the competitive mindset of elite athletes, it is essential to understand some of the mental strategies they use to achieve positive, effective mental states. Imagery is used by many athletes to help increase performance quality and outcome. With imagery, athletes are able to recall stored sensory experiences that relate to their sport outside of a competitive event (Gould & Damarjian, 1996) Internal

visualization, for example, is frequently used by elite skiers prior to a competitive event (Rotella, et. al, 1980). Internal visualization consists of the athlete "seeing" the course as if he/she were skiing it (i.e "The only part of me I can see are the tips of my skis). Less successful, non-elite skiers tend to visualize from an external perspective (i e "I can see myself skiing the course) Other research on visualization also supports the theory that more experienced athletes use internal visualization For example, Olympic gymnasts were found to visualize internally as a common method of pre-event preparation. (Mahoney and Avener 1977).

Another essential coping strategy that successful, distance-event athletes use is dissociation, which is the ability to overlook physical discomfort by focusing on things potentially unrelated to the physical experience (Morgan, 1985) Wrisberg and Pein (1990) found that while dissociation was a strategy that had the potential to help all runners deal with the monotony and physical discomfort of training, it was used primarily by experienced runners. Less experienced runners tended to associate more to uncomfortable stimuli, perhaps due to a lower level of fitness The potential pain involved in an athletic experience may be too great for a less experienced runner to overcome simply by using dissociative strategies Therefore, more research is needed to discover the coping strategies used by novice runners.

Anxiety and Competition

There are two predominant types of anxiety that athletes experience before and during competition. Cognitive anxiety is characterized by a lack of confidence in one's skills and an inability to focus on either the task at hand or the upcoming event (Davidson & Schwartz, 1976) Somatic anxiety is characterized by physical feelings of distress and

anxiousness, such as muscular tension, clammy hands, increased heart rate, and "butterflies" (Martens, Vealey & Burton, 1990) The available research suggests that experienced athletes have a greater capability to minimize both cognitive and somatic anxiety (Krane & Williams 1994)

At this point, it should be noted that experienced athletes are not devoid of cognitive and somatic arousal before and during performances. Just because an athlete is highly experienced does not mean that he/she does not experience cognitive and/or somatic nervousness Instead, it has been suggested that better athletes use their anxiety as a tool to enhance their performance (Mahoney & Avener, 1977). Successful gymnasts, for example, have been found to harness their arousal and put it to good use during their events, while less successful gymnasts tended to "arouse themselves into near-panic states" (Mahoney & Avener, 1977, p 140) which, obviously, inhibits optimal performance

Athletes' Thoughts During Competition

A few attempts have been made to pinpoint the exact thoughts of both successful and non-successful athletes during a competitive event. Successful athletes generally experience positive thoughts during competition (Garfield & Bennet, 1984) These thoughts include positive focus states Positive focus states subsume those states of mind that successful athletes deem desirable for concentration such as self-reinforcement and positive thinking For example, Eklund (1994) found that successful, competitive wrestlers possessed a level of self-confidence that lead to feelings of control and capability during matches

The cognitive state of successful athletes during competition also sheds some light on the "elite" competitive mindset. Collegiate wrestlers who had experienced a successful match often indicate that they have a lack of thought throughout their competition (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992) Such a mindset is likened to that of an "autopilot" Less successful wrestlers in this study equated poor performance with having too much on their minds They described their mental state as unfocused.

Summary

The available literature offers considerable insight into the thoughts, emotions, and metal strategies of elite and non-elite competitors While this information may serve as a useful reference point, more research on the experience of novice competitors is needed to determine the extent to which those experiences are similar to the ones of their more experienced counter parts.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of the first-time competitor Included in this chapter are: (a) a statement of my own personal experience as a runner, (b) a description of the participants, and (c) a discussion of data collection, analysis, and procedures

Previous Experience of the Researcher

In qualitative research, it is impossible to separate the researcher from the study. It was my own personal experiences that led me to investigate the first race experience of a novice runner. Therefore, it is appropriate that I now describe my experiences as they relate to the study at hand.

I have been an athlete my entire life I was a competitive swimmer from age seven to eighteen years. During this time, I became acutely aware of both my gifts and my handicaps. I am physically gifted with the strength and endurance needed to sustain difficult workouts, I am mentally handicapped by a fear of pain and competition. I excelled in swimming only as far as my mind would allow me to and I quit when I entered college

I attended college at a small, Division III, liberal arts institution in southern Indiana. Throughout my first year, I noticed that my life was missing something: athletics. I then began to run a mile a day. Soon enough, I was encouraged by a friend to enter a 5K race. The memories of my first race still remain strong for me. I remember being very intimidated by the faster looking runners. I remember wondering if I would

be able to complete the entire course, and the combination of feeling both tired and exhilarated at the end of the race.

After my first official race, competition took on a different meaning for me Suddenly it was something exciting and fun, not scary and painful. My first race prompted me to join my college Cross Country and Track teams. From that point on, I have experienced a love affair with running that has encompassed success, defeat, surprise, injury, frustration, disappointment, and wonder. Through it all, however, I have never forgotten or recaptured the feeling I had during my first competitive race.

The first race experience for many runners is a turning point in their lives as runners. Suddenly they are not just joggers; they are racers. The great running philosopher George Sheehan denoted the significance of the first race when he said, "The only difference between a jogger and a runner is an entry form "

Participants

The participants involved in this study were runners who trained for, but had never competed in a competitive running race The participants' ages ranged from 19-24 years Four of the participants were women and three of the participants were men All of the participants were students at a large university in the Southeastern United States. Five of the participants ran the race to fulfill a requirement for a jogging class, while two participants ran the race for their own personal satisfaction. The training requirement for these novice competitors was a minimum of 10 miles per week. The minimum training requirement was implemented in order to assure that the experience of runners in training were obtained as opposed to those who were not.

Procedure

Participant observation preceded interviewing. Participant observation is a method in which the researcher immerses him/herself in the world of the participant while the phenomenon is being experienced. This allows the researcher to better understand how the participants' behaviors, actions, and experiences correspond to their words while, at the same time, establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust (Glesne, 1999). I attended every race in which the participants ran. At each race, I engaged each participant in conversation before and after the race.

Before conducting any interviews, I participated in a bracketing interview A bracketing interview is an interview/conversation between the researcher and an outside interviewer in which the researcher's own biases are uncovered and explored The bracketing interview helped me embody the transcendental attitude that is so crucial in phenomenological description. This transcendental enlightenment enabled me to recognize my own biases and transcend their limits during the interviews I conducted (Polho, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) After the bracketing interview was completed, it was transcribed and then analyzed by the bracketing interviewer and me.

The bracketing interview revealed several of my biases First, I assumed that the first race runners would experience pain and exhaustion at some point during the race Second, I assumed that running with others during a first race would motivate the novice competitor. Third, I assumed that the first race participants would go into the race with the goal just of finishing rather than with a more specific outcome goal (e.g. time, place of finish, etc.)

The last step taken before the interviewing process began was the conduction of a pilot interview. This pilot interview allowed me to become familiar with the process for making subsequent interviews, and to uncover additional biases that were not made apparent in the bracketing interview (Polkinghorne, 1989). A sport psychology graduate student with extensive experience in phenomenological methods examined this pilot study. This student gave the researcher several suggestions on how to make the phenomenological interview more fruitful, comfortable, and legitimate.

Before each interview, the participants signed a consent form (Appendix A) explaining (a) the nature of the study (b) how the study could possibly enhance their own performance or the performances of others, and (c) the confidentiality of the study. Participants were free to stop the interview at any time without penalty or prejudiced.

Once the consent form was signed a phenomenological interview was conducted. My role as interviewer was to engage the runners in a conversation about the experience of their first race. It was essential during this interview to maintain as normal a dialogue as possible in order for the participants to feel as if they had the freedom to discuss any experience they felt appropriately described their first race (Quinn, 1980).

The phenomenological interview commenced in response to the following question. What stuck out to you about your first race?" The interview was structured in a way that allowed participants to divulge an accurate description of their first race without feeling the need to include any theoretical interpretations (Polkinghorne, 1989). For example, if the participant referred to the race as "fun," I would not ask "why" it was fun. Instead I would inquire about what "fun" meant to the participant. The interview was supplemented with additional questions such as "Can you further explain that?" or "What

was that like for you?" Each interview was audiotaped and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

I transcribed each interview and reviewed the participant observation notes that I took at the race in which the respective novice competitor participated. Once again, this allowed me to become immersed within the setting of the phenomenon

After transcription, the data was analyzed through a process called the hermeneutic circle The hermeneutic circle is an interpretive action that helps the researcher understand the "whole" of the phenomenon that was experienced (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) The cyclical trend of hermeneutics occurs as the researcher constantly reads and re-reads the transcripts in order to move from a part of the text to the whole and back again (Dale, 2000; Johnson, 1998).

Hermeneutics employs both an idiographic and a nomothetic interpretation of the data. An idiographic interpretation of the data occurred in this study when each participant's interview was analyzed as a particular event A nomothetic interpretation was achieved when the interviews were analyzed in relation to one another (Dale, 2000) These steps afforded me the opportunity to recognize resemblances between experiences as opposed to simply generalizing them (Dale, 2000)

The idiographic interpretation of the data began as I read through each interview. After this initial reading, I noted parts of the interview that seemed to describe the race for that participant. I then read each interview with the assistance of either a sport psychology graduate student familiar with qualitative and phenomenological analysis or a sport psychology professor who was proficient in both methods By meeting and analyzing the transcripts with others, I was better able to identify and eliminate themes

that did not accurately describe the experience of the participants (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

After reflecting on the participant observation notes and reading through the notes taken during the analysis of the transcripts with and without the help of others, I began to categorize the themes according to their congruence with the participants' experiences on a whole. The process of categorizing "fractured" the data in a way that allowed me to rearrange the data into categories that facilitated the emergence of interrelated experiences (Maxwell, 1996). Therefore, each individual theme was representative of the experience as a whole as opposed to representing one unrelated piece of data. While categorizing themes, I was careful to represent and describe each theme in the participants' own words. By sticking with the participants' natural discourse, I achieved a higher level of validity because I avoided any inferences of my own

After the initial thematic representation of the experience emerged, I presented it to the graduate student who had helped analyze the interviews. Through a rigorous comparison of these themes with the participants' words and experiences, the final thematic representation of the experience of a first race emerged This representation is summarized in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Participant Portraits

This chapter will provide a brief introduction to and description of each participant. Participant portraits are designed to further develop both the researcher's and the reader's understandings of the participants' experiences

Sunshine

Sunshine is an 18 year-old sophomore transfer student. She is a highly energetic and social individual who exudes warmth and happiness. Sunshine's motivation to run a race was twofold: 1. She had to run a race to complete a requirement for a jogging class and 2 She considered it a "life-long" goal to run a race

Sunshine's "life-long" goal to run a race stemmed from her previous self-proclaimed obesity. Prior to enrolling in the jogging class, Sunshine lost over seventy pounds and indicated that, in high school, she was unable to run one lap around the track without stopping to walk Therefore, accomplishing a 5K race was a turning point in her life Not only had she accomplished something she thought she was incapable of doing, but she now considered herself a "racer" as opposed to "just a jogger."

Sunshine's new goal is to run a 5K in 28 minutes. She wants to continue running not only to maintain her current weight, but also to allow herself to be a competitive athlete. Sunshine described herself as "competitive by nature," and this race gave her the opportunity to seek out and experience competition in a new, unique manner. She proclaimed that even though she was not as fast as some people, she still felt competitive with them. This competitive spirit spurred on her running dreams and motivated her to set goals that would challenge her ability.

Lea

Lea, a 20-year old junior, ran her first race in order to fulfill a requirement for a jogging class Prior to taking the class, Lea had never run over half of a mile continuously Throughout the seven-week course, however, she was able to accomplish a 40-minute run and a 5K race. Lea had extensive competitive experience on her high school swim team. She claimed she was not the "best swimmer," but was generally consistent.

Music and other people motivate Lea. When she listens to music as she runs, it helps her breath and keep pace. Lea's biggest fear going into her first race was that she would be unable to listen to a Walkman. She was unsure how this would affect her both mentally and physically

Lea indicated that she had a tendency to compare herself to other people on the basis of body type and looks. Secondary to not being able to listen to music, Lea feared being beaten by someone who did not look like they could run fast She said she was afraid her inability to keep up with someone she "should be able to" would hurt her motivation to run another race.

Luke

Luke is a 20-year-old transfer student. Luke had never trained to be competitive in running until he entered a jogging class in which he was required to run a 5K race. Luke's physical history included weightlifting, light jogging, and swimming. Prior to his first 5K race, however, Luke had never competed in any of these activities. Luke's competitive history primarily included marching band competitions throughout high school.

Luke was inspired to start running again when he got a dog. His dog, a bullmastiff, reached a weight of 100 pounds by 6 months of age and required extensive exercise daily. Luke indicated that his dog's need for exercise and the knowledge that his friends were out running motivated him to train for his first race. Luke was not fearful of running his first race. Instead, he was just interested to see "what the experience was like," and to "experience something new on campus."

Sarah

Sarah is a 19-year-old college freshman, was motivated to run a race in order to fulfill a jogging class requirement. Sarah's physical activity had thus far been limited due to extreme asthma, a recent knee surgery, and a heart condition. Before Sarah started her jogging class, she could not run one mile continuously. Since the culmination of the class, Sarah has completed a 40-minute continuous run and a 5K race.

Sarah's main fear going into her first race was that she would not be able to breathe, due to her severe asthma, and would be out on the course alone. She was inspired by her friends, however, who told her that they would stick with her during the race. After completing her first race, Sarah was excited to run more races, but noted that her schoolwork was too hectic to train on a consistent basis. She explained that she would not want to run another race until she was well trained to do so.

Trey

Trey, a 24-year-old student, began running as a means of helping himself get in shape for rock climbing. He was inspired to run his first race by a fellow friend who climbs and runs. When Trey began running, he was able to run a mile and half without stopping. Since then, he has completed both a 5-mile run and a 5K race. Trey's main

concern going into his first race was that he would not complete the race in less than 24 minutes.

Trey's ability to train seriously and race regularly is lessened by the fact that he is a student, a full-time bartender, a husband, and a father of one with another on the way Running, also, is not the only sport in which Trey is active and competitive He is a rock climber and golfer, both of which he participates in regularly. Trey, however, attests to the fact that he will never stop running because he has two dogs that need the exercise and he, himself, needs some time alone.

Caroline

Caroline, a 22-year old college senior, was motivated to run her first race due to a jogging class requirement Prior to beginning running, she was highly active in other activities such as aerobics and weight lifting. Both of Caroline's parents are runners who have completed several marathons around the world. Her dad is a big inspiration to her and he encouraged her to start running as a means of exercise and stress relief. Her mom also motivates her, but is "so naturally talented" that Caroline never compares her own physical abilities to her mother's.

Caroline's first race fell at the same time she was interviewing for jobs. She claimed that it was a bad time for her as she was constantly tired and nervous about the availability of jobs and the course of her future. Caroline knew, however, that she would run her first race with her best friend who was an experienced runner The presence of her best friend helped motivate her to keep training and to make it through her first race in the time that she had wished to run. Without her best friend, Caroline admitted that running her first race would have been much more difficult

Rex

Rex, a 22-year-old graduate student, was inspired to run his first race by a friend who was an experienced runner Rex's competitive background is diverse and extensive, as he has played football, baseball, basketball, and golf. Rex competed in golf at the elite level in college and continues to play, teach, and coach today In spite of Rex's extensive competitive background, he has never been very interested in running because he tended to rely on social and environmental stimulation to excel at sports

Rex entered his first race not knowing how he would run. Rex's first race was run in the company of two friends, whom he knew would inspire him to run a fast time His competitive nature overrode his pain during the race as he tried valiantly to keep up with anyone around him For Rex, the most important lesson he learned during his first race was to run with friends. Friends, Rex claimed, helped pull him through the tough spots of pain in a race.

Chapter 5

Results

Introduction

The experience of a first race became figural after conducting, analyzing, transcribing, and thematizing interviews with the novice competitors. The thematic structure of this experience as it emerged from the participant interviews is described in this chapter. The figural themes that emerged against the ground of the first race were Others in the race, Personal Meaning of the race, Temporality, Surprise and Unfamiliarity, and The Body. These themes must be interpreted as a whole in order for the experience of running a first race to be accurately described and understood. In this chapter, each theme is accompanied by subthemes that further illustrate the meaning of the theme to the novice competitors' experience of a first race

The first theme, Others, was the novice racer's experience of other people in their first race. This theme included the subthemes of Others as Motivation, Comparing Self to Others, and Perceptions of Experienced Others. The second theme, Personal Meaning, was experienced by novice racers as Positive Experience, Accomplishment, and Trying Harder. This theme described the personal impact the race had on the runner. The third theme, Temporality, was described by novice racers as Starting Too Fast, Pace, and Slow Time. Time was a crucial element for the novice runner who had never experienced temporality as it applied to a running race. The fourth theme, Surprise and Unfamiliarity, contained elements of Questioning Ability, Energy After the Race, and Race Paraphernalia. This theme described the unexpected events and surprises that novice runners had during their first race. The final theme, The Body, was described in terms of

Preparing the Body, Mental Strategies, and Physical Discomfort. <u>The Body</u> represented

the way novice runners felt physically during the race. Each of these themes is discussed

in more detail as well as visually depicted (Table 1) in the following section.

Theme One: Others

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was the novice racers'

experience of <u>Others</u> during their first race. This theme was described by three

subthemes Others as Motivation, Comparing Self to Others, and Perceptions of

Experienced Others The first subtheme, Others as Motivation, describes how the

presence of others directly affected the performance of the novice racers. The next two

themes, Comparing Self to Others and Perceptions of Experienced Others, indicated how

the presence of others made the novice racers feel about themselves.

<u>Others as Motivation</u>

The motivating effect of others was felt in many ways by the novice racer The

athletes expressed their experiences of being motivated by others in terms of competition

with others, others pulling for me, others helping me, being alone, and negative

motivation by others. A few athletes described how their competitive natures combined

with the presence of others facilitated their race performance As Rex stated,

> So then in the third mile, we were definitely spread out and I was just thinking
> about making it in. With like maybe a little over a half mile to go, a little kid
> passed me I was determined to stay with this little seven-year-old kid cause I
> thought it would be really funny because I already had two friends who I knew
> were going to be at the finish line I got this idea in my head that I was going to
> stay with this seven year old kid and at the home stretch, you know, I would just
> blow past him on the way in And then with like under half a mile to go the little
> seven-year-old had a really strong kick and he just turned it on. And I couldn't
> stay with him and I just let it go and I was just laughing at myself

Table 1. Examples of raw data themes and subsequent subthemes and major themes

Raw Data Themes	Subthemes	Major Themes
Someone else to run with	Others as Motivation	Others
Pacing off of others		
Support from all the people		
Checking each other out	Comparing Self to Others	
Could beat that person		
Surprised everyone was so fast		
They're gonna kick my butt	Perceptions of	
Skinny, fast, hyper people	Experienced Others	
Consistent pace, good form		
An enjoyable experience	Positive Experience	Personal Meaning
A positive experience		
Like to do it again		
Stuck out was feeling of accomplishment	Accomplishment	
Things you want to accomplish		
Happy with myself		
Had it meant more, would've tried harder	Trying Harder	
Didn't even think about winning		
Didn't try as hard as I should've		
Started out a lot faster than I expected	Starting too fast	Temporality
Overexerted myself in the first mile		
Had so much energy at the start		
Was going to stick to my pace	Pace	
Breathing as a way to keep my pace		
Tried to pick up my pace		
Running in general, I find it boring	Slow time	
Seems like it goes on forever		
Long and kinda boring		
Wasn't sure what time was good	Questioning Ability	Surprise and Unfamiliarity
Complete uncertainty		
Didn't know what was good for me		
Went home and started cleaning	Energy after the Race	
Legs wanted to keep going		
Ready to run another race		
Didn't expect there to be a gun	Race Paraphernalia	
Didn't know there was going to be a clock		
Didn't know what to do with my number		
Feet hurt and I'm getting cramps	Physical Discomfort	The Body
Thirsty the whole time		
Chest was constricted		
Didn't get to stretch	Preparing the Body	
Ran 3 miles in the morning and at night		
Would start at least one hour before race		
Kept saying 'I have 10 minutes left'	Mental Strategies and Dealing With Pain	
So excited didn't even think about it		
Quit thinking about it		

Others as Motivation was also apparent in the athlete's experience of others cheering for them or pushing them on during the race. Trey's following statement demonstrates how others motivated him by cheering him on:

> And just the support from all of the people. Like there was this bench of these little girls and they were just sitting on this bench and they were just like you can do it you know. Just keep going you know, just push on. You only got one mile left or whatever. Then all the people working the mile markers are like 'everybody's looking good.' Just that everybody was so positive.

Another dimension of others as motivation was the presence of running partners. These friends helped motivate some of the runners to keep going. As Luke stated, in reference to his friends "Yeah—they keep you motivated!"

Caroline added more insight into the relationship between herself and others during the race as either motivational or discouraging.

> It was definitely a social thing. You know, of course I was with my best friend so we were talking about you know silly stuff. It was definitely social because I needed a workout buddy to keep me going. She's really good to help me with motivation. My boyfriend, he's a boxer, and he's just unbelievably fit. And so when I exercise with him I hate it because it's so discouraging because he's like come on just go a little faster. And I'm like 'hey, I'm just starting.'

The absence of others was also figural to the athletes. When the runners found themselves alone during the race, they became aware that the presence of others was crucial to their athletic performance. Lea described her experience with loneliness in the following passage:

> ...It was kinda good to see [a friend] at the turnaround point because as he was coming back he said hi and that was nice. But I got to the turnaround point and it seemed like I had so far to go and I had had that little interaction, but then I was all alone again. Running alone is really hard. Kinda like if I had run the race with [a friend] like I do when I train, it probably would've been easier. We could've talked to each other and motivated each other and..

When asked if he had any advice to give other new runners, Rex offered the following advice·

> You're not going to do as well if you don't stay like in a pack. It's so much easier when you have a friend motivating you or yelling for you. Like if you were running with someone who is saying 'Come on. Let's go We can do it.' ..So I think if you have all of your friends there motivating you, you can make it. Like you can suck it up.

The presence of others, however, was not always a positive experience for the athletes Lea described her experience with faster runners who were trying to motivate her as negative

> And then people, like the fast ones, were running the whole race again and they all kept saying 'you're almost there.' And I was like 'Shut up. I don't need your motivation.'

Comparing Self with Others

The starting line prompted the new racers to compare themselves to the other runners on the basis of body type, age, and clothing. Rex and Lea both explained how the starting line served as a perfect place to size up other competitors on the basis of looks. As Rex stated,

> ...But at the starting line you could definitely categorize. Like I could size everybody up. You look around and you think 'oh I could beat that person.' Like you're so much more concentrated on everybody else Like you're so worried about how you will finish compared to them

Lea was also aware of comparing herself to others at the starting line. She said,

> "Yeah—it was right in the beginning and we were standing and it was kinda like we were all checking each other out. Like 'will I pass that person? Surely I'll pass that person ' And then we started running "

Comparing Self to Others also became figural when the novice runners were trying to find people with whom to run. The physical appearance of other runners at the

starting line gave the novice runners an idea of who had similar running abilities Trey

noted that,

> I was just noticing other people and just looking around and like seeing what different kinds of people were there like age wise and how they were dressed and who was serious And I could tell there were some track people there and I was basically just looking for somebody that I could try to stick with

Comparing Self to Others was also apparent during the race as the novice athletes

were being out-run by other competitors. Rex's mixed feelings about losing to a woman

who was significantly older than he was revealed in the following statement·

> And then with like 3/10ths of a mile left this old woman passes me And now, on a side note, on the way from walking to the registration to the start line, my friend and I are walking up there and my friend and I are like 'we're going to have a good time,' and this old lady passed us and we were like 'we just don't want to lose to her.' You know, she was old and that would be really embarrassing if I lost to this woman. Well with like 3/10ths of a mile left this old woman passes me and I look in the gas tank, and there's nothing left And that was a little demoralizing.

Comparisons of self to others led to frustration for some novice racers Many of

the runners found it ironic that they were in shape, but were still being beaten by those

who did not look like they could run fast. Lea was surprised that her own physical ability

was so far beneath that of the other runners.

> It really hurt my motivation because my friend was there and he can run really fast. So what I had imagined was that I would run somewhere in the middle of the crowd. You know, not in the front, but not in the back with the really slow people I didn't know I was going to be the slow runner I mean, like in the middle of the race you look behind you and there's nobody there and you think to yourself 'oh man I suck.' But then it's like you get kinda half way in between You're thinking 'I suck,' but then on the other hand, you're thinking 'I'm doing really well.' It's kinda hard to get thinking good thoughts though

Perceptions of Experienced Runners

The experience of the other racers was another significant factor in the first race

for a novice runner. Experienced runners were judged on the basis of physical presence

and intensity, and were often described as intimidating The novice racers noticed the

clothing and body types of experienced runners. When asked to describe what an

experienced runner looked like Sunshine responded with,

> People who finish in like a time of 18 you know Just like, I don't know, skinny,
> fast, hyper people who you know like wear spandex and stuff I don't know
> (laughing) like people in sports bras and stuff. Just really in shape people

Rex added how clothing defined an experienced runner in the following statement

> Clothing would be the first [thing I noticed] Because the people who were all big
> time runners either had on typical racing attire like high-hipped shorts and tank
> tops or people who had T-shirts from prior races

Experienced runners often intimidated the novice racers. The special clothes that

they wore and the way they warmed up at the starting line was very evident to the novice

racer. Sunshine told about her intimidation when she said,

> I was excited about it until I got there and I started getting really intimidated
> because everyone there was like in their running clothes and had their special
> running shoes and I'm just in shorts and a T-shirt like 'hey I'm gonna go run a
> 5K' But then, I don't know. I was pretty intimidated.

Sarah described feeling out of place when she said,

> "They [experienced runners] kinda made you feel like a little out of place
> Especially like at the beginning when they were all like jumping around and
> getting all warmed up—it's very intimidating"

The way runners ran also helped define experienced runners. Luke described how

he perceived experienced runners in the following statement

> .. Very consistent pace, good form, and uh they looked like they had had fairly
> extensive athletic background in training and not necessarily body building or

weight lifting. But, I mean you could tell they were very athletic people. And [had] a pretty fast pace for a warm-up (laughing)."

Some experienced runners were perceived as different from novice runners on the basis of their intensity. For some of the novice runners it was amazing to see runners who devoted a lot of time and energy to the sport of running. Sarah described another runner she met at the starting line in the following statement:

> She had a lot of…well, like this desire to win that really amazed me I didn't really think that people were like all out running fiends. I had no idea that people like it that much."

Theme Two: Personal Meaning

The theme Personal Meaning describes how either the race or running the race affected the athlete personally Personal meaning was described by the athletes in terms of having a positive experience, trying harder, and accomplishment These three factors described how each athlete experienced his/her participation and performance in terms of how it meant to them personally.

Positive Experience

The athlete's motivation to run another race and their motivation to keep training typified the subtheme of Positive Experience. Motivation to run another race was accentuated by the congratulations of other people either running or working at the race Trey proclaimed that,

> Even if I would've twisted my ankle or taken 45 minutes [to run], it still would have been pretty cool just because everybody was so positive—telling me 'oh you did so good.

Motivation to run another race also came from the personal positive feelings that the participants had upon finishing Both Luke and Caroline noted that their motivation

to run another race stemmed directly from their positive first experience. Luke said, "All

in all it was just an enjoyable experience and I do plan to do it again," while Caroline

added that her first race was "definitely a positive experience   I'll definitely run one

again."

Sunshine described how her first race motivated her to run other races when she

stated,

> It's so weird to say that like a 5K could completely change your attitude or your
> outlook on things, but it can   I'm now just so excited about them   I'm ready to
> run so many races and you never would've thought that like   you know there
> were some people there who were like 'I'm glad this was over and I never have to
> do this again. Thanks for the T-shirt and I'm outta here.' But, I don't know, it
> just gave me something new to do. I'm not just going to run on the track or run
> around campus. Now part of my workouts and part of getting myself healthy is
> going to be running races

Accomplishment

The Personal Meaning of the race to the novice racer was also associated with

feelings of accomplishment. Rex recounted how reveling in his accomplishment after the

race actually soothed his potential disappointment of not running the time he had wanted.

> I thought I would be in more pain. But my body, like my pain ceased
> instantaneously. Now it might have been the adrenaline at the end of the race that
> I was happy with what I had accomplished. I was happy with my time. Like I
> wasn't ecstatic   Like I didn't go above and beyond what I had expected. But I
> was OK with my time   I was happy with myself. I enjoyed the experience.

Sunshine explained how the tangible benefits of accomplishment were a source of

pride for her after her first race in the following statement:

> What stuck out was that feeling of accomplishment   You know, I did hang up
> my number when I got home. I filled out the little thing on the back and put 'first
> race' on it.

Sarah explained how her feelings of accomplishment stemmed from the fact that asthma had severely limited her physically in the past. Sarah said that,

> [I] was really relieved. I was just really glad that it was over. I went home and I was like 'Yeah—I ran a 5K today.' It was just like…I never imagined me ever running. Because of my asthma I used to like barely run a mile and be like (breathing heavily) and I had such problems in high school especially with my asthma."

Not walking at all in the race was also a significant source of accomplishment for the runners. The pride of not walking through the whole race made the novice racers feel good about their performance. For Rex, once again, not walking served as a means of overriding his disappointment of not running the time he had hoped

> …And I could immediately see my results when I crossed the finish line and I was like 23:40 That was over like what I figured would be a great time to run, which was like 21·00. But I wasn't disappointed at all because I had continuously run the whole time, which I was proud of.

For Luke, not walking was a way in which he quelled some of his fears concerning an upcoming skills test in his jogging class and gained a sense of accomplishment.

> It felt great. I mean I didn't stop to walk. I kept a fairly steady pace throughout and I was able to speed up at the end. I felt like I had really accomplished something. It made me a little less fearful of a 40-minute jog I have to do by the end of this semester.

Trying Harder

Personal Meaning was also defined by the participants in terms of the amount of effort they put into running the race. The majority of the novice racers felt as if they did not try as hard as they could have in order to run a better time This lack of effort, however, was not seen as negative. Instead, it was positively viewed as a step toward

running their own races despite the competitive atmosphere in which they were immersed. As Sarah explained,

> I was just going to run my race. But I didn't think too much about like winning or anything or even really care about how I did I was just like ..I just want[ed] to do it just to see what I could do.

Rex described how beating another person was not worth the pain he would have felt had he tried a little harder.

> .. And had it meant more to me to beat that person, I probably would've just tried a little more to stay with [the competition]. But it didn't mean enough to me at that point to really go through the pain to achieve that goal.

Theme Three: Temporality

A third major theme that emerged from the ground of a first race was Temporality. Time is certainly a factor in any competition that involves racing The experience of time for the novice runners in this study encompassed three temporal states: Starting Too Fast, Slow Time as a result of boredom/monotony, and Pace.

Starting Too Fast

Starting the race faster than they had expected was a common theme among the first race participants Some of the runners were able to keep a reasonable pace despite the quick start. Luke explained how he was able to maintain a steady pace through the start when he said,

> We started out a lot faster than I thought we would. I was able to keep a pretty steady pace though. I think I finished in 31 minutes and 10 seconds.

Caroline mentioned how she was able to resist taking off with the other runners.

> It was really funny cause when we started, everybody just took off so fast and I was like 'oh no what are we doing?' And I thought I'm gonna get run over. So I kinda hung back a little bit just to let everybody get out of my way.

Other novice racers were not able to pace themselves quite as well when the lead pack blazed through the starting line Trey commented on how the fast start affected him later in the race

> Like I know I overexerted myself in the first mile You know And I guess it turned out OK time-wise, but as far as the way I felt, you know, I was just really tired. Like my legs were tired and my legs don't normally get tired.

Still other novice racers were simply fascinated by the speedy start. Rex mentioned how the fast start gave him an appreciation for how fast the lead runners intended to run throughout the race

> I thought [starting fast] was really cool because I was so interested and so fascinated. I really wanted to see how fast fast was And I figured out within the first 10 yards. You know I ran maybe a thousand yards and the people who were going to win the race were already out of eyesight. And it was basically like they were running at a speed that I would consider like running. Like a speed that was like me going out and running a 100-meter dash. And that's how they were running and they were planning on running that way for the next 3 1 miles and that blew me away.

Pace

Once the race began, pacing oneself became an important concern Sticking to a predetermined pace, pacing off of others, and listening to one's body while they were running became figural to the subtheme of pace.

For Sunshine, staying with the pace she had originally intended to run was extremely important while running her race Without sticking to her pace she thought that she could have physically suffered.

> I wasn't going to change my pace. I was going to stick to my pace because I didn't want to kill myself at the beginning and try running too hard.

For many of the runners, the presence of other runners made adhering to a certain pace easier Trey explained how picking people out and trying to run with them helped him run faster during the race

> I told myself I was going to pace off of her and that turned out to be the one who won for the girls. I ran my first mile in like 6 minutes and realized that she was out-distancing me and was pretty much hurting the whole time…As soon as that girl got away from me, I picked another group of guys to run with and ran with those guys for a while. And then they started to outdistance me after about two miles. And after that, it was basically just like one foot in front of the other until I finished

Knowledge of one's own body was also a key element in the experience of pace for some of the runners. Lea mentioned that her running focus usually centered around breathing and/or music to help her maintain pace.

> I mean breathing It helps me pace. But usually I use music and I can focus on that. But when I don't have it, I have to focus on something like breathing as a way to keep my pace and try to focus on not working too hard. But then I get thirsty and it kinda screws it up. .I don't know how I did it in the race because in training I get to two miles and I just stop.

Slow time

During the race, the runners often experienced time going slowly. Boredom and monotony during the race were generally the main ingredients of slow time At one point, Lea actually felt stuck in the race. It was as if she was trapped between her own boredom and her physical ability

> I think I was bored There were times that I wanted to run faster just to get it over with but then I wouldn't have been able to finish without walking. So it's kinda hard because you have to hold yourself back or I would've really worn myself out quickly. So you're bored and you really can't sprint anywhere and it's kinda like you're stuck in this monotonous rhythm of running thinking 'when is this going to be over?' Because it really seems to go on forever.

Boredom also plagued the novice racers when the initial excitement of running their first race wore off. Rex explained that during one point of the race it felt as if time was slowing down

> And then at like the mile and a half, there was this like long stretch And it was long and kinda boring along the river. And at about [that time] I lost my initial high of running my first race.

Theme Four: Surprise and Unfamiliarity

Surprise and Unfamiliarity emerged as central experiences during these runners' first race The racers' inabilities to predict their performance outcomes, their surprise at their energy after the race, and the surprise and confusion they felt about some of the race paraphernalia were subcompnents of this major theme.

Questioning Ability

Being unsure of their running abilities scared some of the first race participants This fear manifested itself in preoccupations with their ability to complete the race without walking, run a good time, know what to do, and come in last. Sunshine's self-doubt stemmed from all four of these factors

> .It just seemed like everyone else knew what they were doing and I wasn't exactly sure what I could do Just because, you know, if I didn't walk, that's pretty much what I can do right now ..You know, it's just a lot of different things Being unsure of what I could accomplish, you know and how I was going to be doing at the end and if, you know if I was going to come in last.

Luke described his fear in the following statement:

> Yeah, it was definitely a little bit scary because of, you know, uncertainty of what it's going to be like or how you're going to do. Complete uncertainty.

Some of the runners, however, perceived their inability to predict their performance outcome as positive. Rex shared this positive outlook

I was just very enthusiastic about doing this. I had never done it and I wasn't trying to win so I had no expectations on how I was going to finish I had a rough idea of what time would be good for me. But I wasn't exactly sure about times for that race or how well I should do with it being my first race. So it was very cool

Energy After the Race

Many of the novice racers were surprised by the energy they experienced after running the race Rex's surprise stemmed from his experience with other sports in which he had been competitive in the past

. This was something that really amazed me. I thought that like, I stood around for maybe a minute or two and like I had all this energy and I was so surprised by that because I thought, you know, this is a ..I've never really done an endurance sport, like I've always done basketball or baseball before. You know sports with like quick bursts and you had time to rest in between. And running this race, I had to use so much more endurance that I really thought I would be dead all day Like I would just be tired and fatigued. And then at the end of the race, maybe I still had adrenaline in me or something, but I was so surprised that I had all of this energy. I felt like I should go back out there and at least run it again You know maybe not enjoy it. But I felt like I could at least run another three miles

Sunshine admitted that her energy level after the race made her feel as if she could have run the race all over again This was reflected by the following comment·

I was like say (hand gesture) this far from the finish line and I was worn out and I was ready for it to be over and right at the finish line, I think I was ready to run another one It was like just exciting just going through [the finish line] and they are all like 'let me take your number ' And I was like 'oh I have a number ' But umm you definitely feel like right after it you could definitely run another one But then you realize it won't happen

Race Paraphernalia

The objects that were actually involved in the race such as pin-on numbers, food/water, the clock, and the gun all worked as either surprise elements or marks of confusion for the novice racers Many of the racers were surprised by the way in which

some of the objects were used. Lea articulated her confusion about energy gels that were given to her at the beginning of the race.

> When I was registering, they offered me all of those little gel packs   Are those good? They look really gross and I took one and I was like 'I'm not going to eat this ' But I wondered if this was like a gimmick or what.

Confusion about the race number was also a prevalent theme among the novice racers. This confusion ranged from how to put it on to what to do with it at the end.

Luke described his confusion in the following statement:

> Well it was an interesting experience getting my number. I was number 24. And at first I didn't know what to do with it because it didn't have a cord that goes around my neck. I had to find some pins and pin it to the jacket that I was wearing

Rex shared his amazement at how the race number was used to actually place the individual runners at the end of the race.

> And then it was just cool. Like they ripped off the stub of like your bib or ticket and that's how they placed you. I never knew any of that. Like that was just cool seeing the process of how they keep track and stuff

The immediate feedback with the clock right at the end of the race was also a big surprise for the novice racers. Caroline explained her surprise in the following statement

> I didn't know that there was going to be that big clock there—I though we'd take our own [time]. I mean I'm sure they do that in every race, but I didn't expect it.

Sarah described her amazement when she said,

> When we got to the end there was like just this big clock with the time and everything and all of the other people who had already run the race   .it was weird, you know.

Caroline also noted her surprise at the both the presence of the starting gun and how it was used within the context of the race.

> I actually didn't know what to expect at all so you know. I didn't expect there to be a gun at the start line and I didn't really think he would use it

Theme Five: The Body

As in most sports, experiencing the body was noted as an extremely important part of competition. The novice racers were aware of their bodies in three specific forms. Preparation of the Bodies, Mental Strategies dealing with Pain in their bodies, and Physical Discomfort. These three subthemes together provided the contextual whole of how the novice racers perceived their bodies before, during, and/or after the race.

Physical Discomfort

Physical discomfort is typical during any physical activity that requires the endurance and strength of an event like a 5K race. While they were running the race, the novice racers noted a number of physical distresses. Trey explained how his thirst plagued him throughout much of his first race

> I just felt dry Like I was so thirsty. I mean after a half mile, I was thirsty and I wanted water. And then I got a little bit of water and I felt good for a while But I just felt really dehydrated.

Cramping up during the race was also a physically uncomfortable experience for the novice racers Lea stated that "at the halfway point I was thinking 'oh my feet hurt and I'm getting cramps." Rex noted that his cramping, although debilitating at its onset, was something that he knew, from other competitive experiences, would pass.

> And then I had some serious [abdominal] issues on the right side of my body that kicked in and that was a concern coming into the final mile and change And so that I was cognizant of and I was thinking that that was going to pass, but it didn't. Just because I know that from playing, like I played football and baseball, that certain kinds of pain definitely do pass. So I knew it was going to but I didn't know for how long [it would stay]. I was hoping it would go away.

Having difficulty breathing was another aspect of physical discomfort experienced by the athletes. Sarah's asthmatic condition was a concern to her as she was running her first race.

> I have pretty bad asthma and ever since I began running it's gotten a whole lot better I can run a lot longer now without having my first like, where my chest constricts. But [during the race] it was kinda like my chest was real constricted and stuff.

Lea explained how running out of breath during the race was difficult for her. Her experience of being out of breath involved breaking the sequence of her breathing rhythm. As she stated,

> It feels hard when you're running and you're out of breath. And it's OK when you don't swallow or say something to mess up your breathing, but like when you have to do that, your breath gets thrown off and you're like (panting) "

Preparation of the Body

Preparing one's body for the physical discomfort that accompanies running a race became apparent to the new racers as they were training and warming up for the race. Some of the novice racers were able to foresee the importance of preparation. Sunshine attested to training very diligently for her first race simply because of her anticipation and excitement.

> We ran three miles in the morning and three miles at night like everyday the week before Because, you know, because we were excited about it.

Other novice racers became aware of the importance of preparation after completing the race Trey said,

> Next time I hope that I'm a little more prepared. I just hope that it feels better even if I run the same time like twenty times in a row or whatever. I just want it to feel good

Trey also noted that not warming up properly lead to some physical discomfort during the race

> I just needed more preparation. Like I didn't get to stretch and my legs were like really cold and as soon as I started running, you know I got that feeling that's like, I don't know if it's a burn, but just really tired. Not like tearing muscles, but just tight Not feeling like you're getting good circulation or something Like I usually jog like a third of a mile loop and before, I stretch or whatever and I jog really slow. Like I just shuffle to get my legs warm. And I don't know Like I wanted to just stretch for a little but and I only stretched for like 10 seconds

Mental Strategies and Dealing with Pain

Using one's mind to deal with the pain of an athletic event is a common practice among athletes Rex explained how he was able to push through some of his bodily pain using positive self-talk.

> Like I would say from 1 5 miles to 2.5 miles I started to cramp up, and for that period of time I had to keep saying I have to put up with this because I know there is an end coming I think that's what allows people in sports to do it because it's not for the rest of your life. You can, in your head, roughly figure out when you will finish and you can say to yourself 'can I put up with this for this period of time?' I think it's relatively easy to justify putting up with the pain Like if it's only 20-25 minutes of pain I can see that ..I kept saying to myself 'I have 10 minutes left. I have 7 minutes left.' I knew there was a light at the end of the tunnel I could see it and every time my body kept saying 'Stop Slow down," I would be like 'just wait one second You'll be done in 5 minutes. You can get all the water you want when you're finished.' So you justify it If I want to run as well as I want to, then I can put up with it for a period of time that I can mentally handle

Some of the novice racers were also very proficient in employing dissociative strategies Caroline described how not knowing how much longer she had in the race helped her dissociate better than when she trained on a track.

> . .You know, you're not thinking about it the whole time. I guess I just quit thinking about it. I notice that when I'm running on the track, I'm like 'OK Just two more miles,' and I start kinda you know my body just kinda starts wearing out. But when I run around campus and I don't know how much farther I have to go, I just do it till I get there and it's measured time wise ..Then it's a lot easier

because you're not thinking the whole time 'OK I've gone this far and I have this much more to go '

Sunshine said that her excitement toward running the race acted as a dissociative strategy on it's own. She noted,

> Like during the race, you were so excited you didn't even think about it. You don't think you're breathing hard, getting tired, whatever

Summary

The experience of a first race was marked by an awareness of others, personal meaning of the race, temporality as it applied to running the race, surprise and uncertainty experienced before, during, and after the race, and the body during the race These five elements represent co-themes that comprise the total experience of running one's first race Describing one without the others strips the meaning of the experience. Presenting these five themes together, however, represents the personal, contextual, and social richness that comprises the first race experience for these novice competitors.

Chapter 6

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine what the experience of a first organized race was like for a novice competitor   The previous chapter described the thematic structure of the first race   In this chapter I will describe how each theme, The Body, Others, Temporality, Surprise and Uncertainty, and Personal Meaning relates to the theoretical and applied literature in phenomenology and sport psychology   Although the sections below are devoted to individual themes, it should be noted that no theme stands alone but, rather, all themes are integrally related to the others

The Body

The Body was experienced by participants in this study through physical discomfort, preparation, and mental strategies used to cope with pain. MacGillivray (1986) has suggested that the experience of the lived body encompasses three major themes. engagement (vitality/activity), interpersonal meaning (self-expression/appearance), and corporeality (instrument/object)

Engagement refers to experiencing the body in such an absorbed manner that one is not conscious of the physicality of the body (MacGillivray, 1986)   In the present study, the subtheme 'Mental Strategies and Dealing with Pain' describes how many of the first race participants found themselves so immersed in the world of the race, that they did not think about their physical discomfort. For many of the racers, the

excitement, wonder, and confusion of participating in their first race took precedence over bodily discomfort.

Experiencing the body through interpersonal meaning took the form of body as symbol (MacGillivray, 1986). Body as appearance and expression of self further delineated the body as a symbol to the world. The novice racers in this study experienced the body as symbol in the following ways 1. Body as symbolic of running ability and inexperience and 2. Other's bodies as symbolic of their superior running ability and experience. The subtheme of Experienced Others emphasized how the bodies of others versus the self was a way in which the body became figural for their novice competitors The following passage describes how the appearance of one runner's body marked her as a novice runner:

> And I was excited about it until I got there and I started getting really intimidated Everyone there was like in their running clothes and had their special running shoes and I'm just in shorts and a T-shirt like 'hey, I'm gonna go run a 5k.'

Experiencing the body through corporeality refers to knowing the body through its existence as an object or as a means by which to obtain goals (MacGillivray, 1986) The novice racers experienced body as physical object when they described their physical discomfort during the race Cramping, dehydration, muscle tightness and fatigue, and difficulty breathing were each ways in which the body was experienced as having a limited capacity.

The Body was also experienced during the first race as a means by which a goal could be achieved Many of the racers described how the physical discomfort they endured during the race was a sign that their bodies were surmounting a difficult obstacle MacGillivray (1986) described how pacing, speed, and breathing all help the

body accomplish the task of running This is obviously the case with many novice racers

and was described in the theme Temporality as participants related they used how

breathing and pacing to maintain an even tempo throughout the race.

The major difference between the present study and the study conducted by

MacGillivray (1986) is that in this study I focused primarily on a physical event in which

being aware of the body is almost always linked to physicality The general context of

MacGillivray's study was that of everyday life where the body is experienced in a variety

of ways (i e through illness, depression, times of the day, etc). My research question

"what was the experience of a first race like for you?" required the participants to tell

about a physical experience that they had encountered while their body was in an active

state. Running a race generally leads to feelings of using and sensing the body

physically

Others

In this study, the participants experienced others as motivators and non-

motivators, as tools of comparison, and as more experienced competitors. Nowell (1991)

described three major themes associated with the experience of others relationships,

comparisons, and benefits Interestingly the experience of others within the context of a

first race bears a remarkable resemblance to all three of these themes.

Nowell (1991) described the experience of a relationship with others as the

connectedness and/or alienation from others. Connectedness is associated with feelings

of "relatedness " In this study, the novice racers who had friends with whom to run the

race felt a close proximal bond with these running partners. Many of the racers described

these relationships as motivating. Disconnectedness, however, manifested itself in the

form of intimidation. All of the novice runners attested to feeling intimidated, and therefore disconnected, to the more experienced runners. Many of the novice competitors felt that the experienced runners made them feel "out of place" and "in the wrong league."

Nowell's (1991) second theme, comparing ones' self to others, was very significant to the experience of the first race participant. Nowell likens comparing oneself to others to "people-watching." Novice race participants engaged in "people-watching" as a means of comparing and contrasting physical talent.

Nowell's (1991) third theme, the experience of others as beneficial to self, coincides with the experience the first racers in the present study had with others The beneficial presence of others was described in the subtheme Others as Motivation in terms of the way others facilitated performance and created a positive experience. Many of the first race participants explained how friends, other runners, and/or volunteers helped get them through the tough parts of the race The existence of others in the first race was clearly beneficial and invaluable to these novice racers

Research on the experience of others during a performance bout in sport psychology has primarily operated from a social facilitation framework. Social facilitation is defined as the negative and/or positive performance response of individuals due to the presence of others (Pargman, 1998). For example, research by Zajonc (1965) revealed that the presence of others may facilitate performance. Consistent with Zajonc's proposal, Obermeier, Landers, and Easter (1983) found that 400-meter dash runners ran faster while running with others than when running alone.

Temporality

In the present study, Temporality was experienced by the first race participants as

Starting Too Fast, Pace, and Slow Time. The experience of starting too fast and,

therefore, being off pace is a common phenomenon of competitive running that is not

unique to novice runners. Even experienced competitive runners attest to having

problems with starting races at too fast a pace. In 1979, when Joan Benoit Samuelson ran

a 2 hour, 35 minute marathon to break the American record, she admitted, "I went out too

fast. I ran the first mile in 5:42 and I said to myself, 'Whoa! This is a long race.' It took

me a while to slow down" (Shister, 1979, p. 25). While Benoit-Samuelson was obviously

much more experienced and had a much longer race to run than the participants in this

study, this quote is reminiscent of some of the remarks these novice racers made about

the fast start.

The dangers of starting too fast in a race have been well documented in the

applied sport literature. The adrenaline and overall excitement that accompany any race

can make it almost impossible to avoid starting too fast. According to Gorman (1997)

one of the most important elements in training for and completing a successful marathon

is to know your pace and stick to it. Gorman describes how the adrenaline rush of a race

can make a fast mile feel slow: "You know how 8:30's feel in training. But do you know

how they feel when your heart's pounding louder than the zillions of waffle soles around

you? Here's a hint: they feel more like 9:30's. In fact, thanks to race-day adrenaline, any

pace will feel far easier than normal" (p. 45). Other applied running literature suggests

that listening to breathing, practice, and having racing experience can all help runners learn the most appropriate pace (Daniels, 1998; Lebow & Averbuch, 1992).

The sport psychology literature has pinpointed several reasons why the phenomenon of starting too fast occurs. Chief among these is the strong relationship between arousal and performance. Arousal is defined as a physiological or autonomic reaction to a situation (Gould & Krane, 1996). Arousal can be measure both physiologically through heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, etc, and through self-reports or survey responses (Thayer, 1967). Many of the first race competitors in the present study attested to feeling nervous and/or overly excited, therefore suggesting a high state of arousal. This high arousal state could have been one of the reasons why first race competitors started faster in a race than anticipated.

Anxiety is a dimension of arousal defined as an emotional reaction to a perception or thought (Gould & Krane, 1996). Often, the disparity between a perceived demand, in this case the first race, and one's perception of his/her ability to respond to that perceived demand (i.e the racer's ability to perform) can result in increased anxiety (Martens, 1977). Excess nervousness, excitement, and unfamiliarity with the racing process often lead the first racers in this study to feel anxiety concerning their capabilities relating to more experienced runners and their ability to perform.

Obermeier (1983) found that runners who ran alone ran a more even pace that those who ran with other runners. The subtheme Starting Too Fast described how some of the first race participants were influenced by the speed of others After they had lost contact with the pack, however, many runners were able to run at a more even pace However the novice competitor appeared to benefit from a faster start by acclimating to it

and running a better race time than he/she had anticipated   One racer described this in the following quote "We started out a lot faster than I thought we would, only I was able to keep a pretty steady pace."

Another temporal theme described by the first race participants was Slow Time   One of the characteristics of peak performance reported by elite athletes is mental relaxation (Garfield & Bennet, 1984)   Mental relaxation is often accompanied by time going slowly   On the contrary, when performers are not mentally relaxed, they perceive that things move too quickly (Garfield & Bennet, 1984)   Time moving quickly at the beginning of a race may be a manifestation of a low degree of mental relaxation for novice competitors in this study   However when the novice racers experienced time going slowly, it was not due to mental relaxation   Instead, the subtheme Slow Time was brought on by periods of boredom and loneliness   This result suggests that time passing slowly does not always relate to internal serenity, but can be due to a lack of stimulation   In fact, many participants in the present study described the race as seeming longer than expected because they were bored.

Surprise and Unfamiliarity

The experience of Surprise and Unfamiliarity for the novice competitors was accompanied by feeling unsure of their abilities   The following items exemplify two personal questions that the novice competitors articulated to me during their interviews that related to being unsure of their abilities. could they complete the race in a certain time and/or could they complete the race without walking. Being unsure of one's ability to complete a task is not uncommon for beginning athletes. Dave Scott, five-time Ironman Triathalon Champion, described his inability to predict his performance in his

first triathalon in the following statement. "I was going totally on instinct—I had no specific triathalon training—but I wanted to see what I could do. I figured I could lumber through the 4-mile run and I knew I could handle the swim, so I took off running in my sneakers...I had never competed in cycling and running before and I had no idea how well I could do in triathlons" (Scott, 1986, p 15)

Personal Meaning

Part of experiencing Personal Meaning is gaining satisfaction through "the actual experience of becoming competent and feeling in control" (Orlick, 1990, p 5). This satisfaction was embodied by the novice racers through the feelings of accomplishment that motivated them to run another race. While positive experiences are subjective and difficult to explain, accomplishing a goal is one consistent reward of many athletes' labors. Many of the first racers noted their desire to finish the race distance without walking. Achieving this goal lead to feelings of accomplishment and exhilaration Goal setting, and its positive effect on practice and performance, has been well documented in the sport psychology literature. Goal setting is defined as achieving a specific state of affairs within a specified time (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981).

McPherson (2000) notes how novice competitors often set fewer goals than their more experienced counterparts Despite their novice status, the participants in this study set many goals before they raced. Two types of goals specifically set by several of the novice competitors were subjective goals (i.e those that include benefiting the self) and outcome goals (i.e. those that focus on the end result of the race)(Gould, 1998). Many of the novice racers also described the subjective goal of "staying in shape." While not all

of the racers set outcome goals, many were able to gather from their training runs an idea of the times they would be able to run in the race

While many experienced athletes may set unrealistic outcome goals that may in turn lead to increased levels of anxiety and lower motivation and confidence (Gould, 1998), many of the novice racers in this study surprised themselves by running much faster than they had originally anticipated (in a few cases by as much as three minutes) Since they had never competed in a race, the novice racers were fully unaware of the different mental, physical, and emotional stimuli that may deter and/or facilitate performance. While one racer, for example, did not achieve his overall time goal, this did not seem to result in a lowered motivation and/or diminished confidence levels The fact that he had simply accomplished the goal of competing in and finishing his first race was incentive enough to continue training and racing.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of a first race for novice competitors. Based on the experiences articulated by the participants, the following conclusions are apparent.

1   The presence of others in a first race is an unbreakable thread that weaves together the motivational, emotional, and physical experience for a novice competitor.

2. A first race is full of temporal, physical, and emotional surprises.

3   A first race often includes elements of personal meaning that include feelings of accomplishment and excitement.

4   A first race is a positive experience that can motivate the novice competitor to run another race.

<u>Recommendations for Future Researchers</u>

The following recommendations are offered for future researchers:

1. Explore the first competitive experience of individuals who have similar competitive backgrounds It may be that previous competitive experience in other sports may make the experience of a first race very different than for a competitor who has never competed.

2. Explore the experience of older runners. In this study I selected a very young group of participants to interview. However it is quite common for runners to begin their competitive quest at an older age. Therefore research including an older age base may enrich our understanding of a first race experience

3. Include first-race competitors who are competing solely for their own intents and purposes Five of the participants in this study ran their first race as a mandatory class assignment While four of these five subjects stated that they would have run a race on their own, a mandatory assignment may have influenced the dynamics of a first race experience.

4   Examine a sample of participants who have approximately the same physical abilities The occurrence of physical discomfort, intimidation, and the use of mental strategies, such as dissociation and self-talk, seemed to be very different among athletes of different ability levels

5   Compare and/or contrast the experiences of male and female first-race competitors.

Implications for Novice Competitors

The group that should benefit most from this study is runners embarking upon their first race. The results of this study have several implications for such individuals The knowledge gained from this study suggests that novice competitors should:

1. Prepare for unexpected surprises that a first race may hold such as a fast start, feelings of accomplishment, and extra energy at the end

2 Expect other racers to be experiencing feelings of uncertainty concerning their performance abilities The fact that all of the novice racers in this study attested to feeling some type of intimidation, fear, and/or uncertainty as to how well they would do in the race may reduce some of the apprehension novice runners may have about their first race

3 Appreciate how the presence of others can impact a first race, either positively or negatively. First racers may make their first experience more enjoyable and more successful if they take the advice of the runners in this study and run with a friend who is of the same ability level This friend may possess the ability to encourage them to finish the race, train, or run a certain time.

Implications for Coaches

This study yielded a number of implications for coaches who coach non-elite or novice athletes. Coaches need to be aware of all of the factors that facilitate and debilitate race performances including

1. The strong motivational effect of others during a race, including others running with the athlete and others cheering for the athlete. Coaches may advise athletes with

similar abilities to run with one another during races to help promote motivation and positive experiences.

2   The fact that much of the first race experience is characterized by feelings of intimidation and confusion   Since peak performances, as pointed out by Garfield and Bennet (1984) are often accompanied by mental relaxation, feelings of intimidation and confusion could have a negative affect on the experience, not to mention the performance, of the novice competitor. It would, therefore, be in the coach's best interest to familiarize the novice athlete with some of the emotions and experiences that typically accompany a first race such as fast starts and race paraphernalia

References

References

Berger, B.G., & Mackenzie, M.M. (1980). A clinical approach to sport psychology Motor Skills Theory into Practice 4, 67-76

Brewer, B.W., & Sachs, M.L (1996). The mind of the runner Attentional focus and endurance performance. Unpublished manuscript, Springfield College, Springfield, MA

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) Flow: The psychology of optimal experience New York· Harper and Row

Cote, J , Salmela, H., Abderrahim, B., & Russel, S. (1993) Organizing and interpreting unstructured qualitative data The Sport Psychologist 7, 127-137.

Dale, G (1996) Existential phenomenology. Emphasizing the experience of the athlete in sport psychology research. The Sport Psychologist 10, 307-321

Dale, G (2000). Distraction and coping strategies of elite decathletes during their most memorable performances. The Sport Psychologist 14, 17-41.

Daniels, J. T. (1998). Daniel's running formula: Programs and strategies: 1500 to Marathon Champaign Human Kinetics

Davidson, R. J., & Schwartz, G E (1976). The psychobiology of relaxation and related stress· A multidimensional process theory. In D.I. Mostofsky (Ed), Behavior control and modification of physiological activity (pp 399-442). N.J · Prentice Hall

Davis, C , & Mogk, J.P (1994). Some personality correlates of interest and excellence in sport. International Journal of Sport Psychology, 25, 131-143.

Eck, B M (2000, April) Beginning racing guide Runner's World, 34, 68-73

Eklund, R.C (1994) A season-long investigation of competitive cognition in collegiate wrestlers. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 85, 169-183.

Frazier, S.E (1987). Introversion-extroversion measures in elite and non-elite distance runners. Perceptual and Motor Skills, 64, 867-872.

Garfield, C A , & Bennet, H.Z. (1984) Peak performance· Mental training techniques of the world's greatest athletes Los Angeles Tarcher.

Glesne, C (1999) Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction New York. Addison Wesley.

Gorman, M O. (1997). Run your best marathon. Runner's World, 32, 44-52.

Gould, D , Eklund, R C , & Jackson, S A (1992) 1988 US Olympic wrestling excellence. II Thoughts and effect occurring during competition. The Sport Psychologist, 6, 383-402

Gould, D., & Damarjian, N. (1996). Imagery training for peak performance In J.L. Van Raalte & B.W Brewer (Eds), Exploring sport and exercise psychology (pp 25-49). Washington D C.· American Psychological Association

Gould, D , & Krane, V (1996). The arousal-athletic performance relationship: Current status and future directions In T.S Horn (Ed.), Advances in sport psychology (pp. 119-141). Champaign: Human Kinetics,

Gould, D. (1998). Goal setting for peak performance In J.M Williams (Ed), Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance. (pp. 182-196) Mountain View· Mayfield.

Harmon, J. (1989, March). From pud to stud. Runner's World, 32, 71-77

Heideggar, M. (1962). Being and time New York Harper and Row.

Johnson, M.S. (1998) The athlete's experience of being coached· An existential phenomenological investigation. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Klein, M (1982). Qualitative research methods in the analysis of identity of top-class women athletes International Review of Sport Sociology, 17, 85-96

Krane, V , Anderson, M.B , & Stream, W.B. (1997) Issues of qualitative research methods and presentation. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 19, 213-218.

Krane, V., & Williams, J M (1994) Cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and confidence in track and field athletes: The impact of gender, competitive level, and task characteristics. International Journal of Sport Psychology, 25, 203-217.

Lebow, F., & Averbuch, G. (1992) The New York road runners club complete book of running. New York: Random House

Locke, E.A , Shaw, K.N , Saari, L.M., & Latham, G.P. (1981) Goal setting and task performance Psychological Bulletin, 90, 125-152.

MacGillivray, W. (1986) Ambiguity and embodiment: A phenomenological analysis of the lived body. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Mahoney, M.J & Avener, M. (1977). Psychology of the elite athlete: An exploratory study. Cognitive Therapy and Research, 1,135-141

Martens, R. (1977). Sport competition anxiety test. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Martens, R., Vealey, R., & Burton, D. (1990). Competitive anxiety in sport. Champaign. Human Kinetics.

Maxwell, J A. (1996) Qualitative research design. An interactive approach. London Sage Publications.

McPherson, S.L. (2000). Expert-novice differences in planning strategies. Journal of Sport and Physical Activity, 22, 39-62

Morgan, W P. (1978) The mind of the marathoner. Psychology Today, 11, 38-49.

Newcombe, P & Boyle, G. (1995). High school sports personalities: Variations across participation level, gender, type of sport, and success. International Journal of Sport Psychology, 26, 277-294.

Nowell, B. (1991). The human experience of other people. Paper presented at the 1991 Meetings of the Southeastern Psychological Association, New Orleans, LA.

Obermeier, G·E., Landers, D M , & Easter, M.A. (1983) Social facilitation on speed events: The coaction effect in racing dogs and trackmen. In W N Widmeyer (Ed.), Physical activity and the social sciences (pp 418-430). Ithaca, NY. Mouvement Publications.

Orlick, T. (1990). In pursuit of excellence: How to win in sport and life through mental training. Champaign, IL: Leisure Press.

Pargman, D (1998). Understanding sport behavior New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Polkinghorne, D E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R.S. Valle & S Halling (Eds.) Existential phenomenological perspectives in psychology. Exploring the breadth of human experience (pp 41-62). New York: Plenum Press

Pollio, H R., Henley, T, & Thompson, C.B. (1997). The phenomenology of everyday life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quinn, M (1980) Qualitative evaluation methods New York· Sage Publications

Rotella, R.J., Gansneder, B., Ojala, D., & Billing, J (1980). Cognition and coping strategies of elite skiers An exploratory study of young, developing athletes Journal of Sport Psychology, 2, 250-254.

Scott, D (1986) Dave Scott's triathlon training. New York. Simon & Schuster.

Shister, G. (1979). Pounding the pavement: Joan Benoit triumphs in Boston. Women's Sports, 34, 25-26

Straub, W.F., & Williams, J.M. Mind over matter. In W.F Straub & J M. Williams (Eds.), Cognitive sport psychology (pp. 311-316) New York: Sport Science Association.

Strean, W B. (1998). Possibilities for qualitative research in sport psychology. The Sport Psychologist, 12. 333-344.

Thayer, R.E (1967) Measurement of activation through self-report. Psychological Reports, 20, 663-678

Valle, R.S , & King, M. (1978) An introduction to existential-phenomenological thought in psychology. In R S. Valle & M. King (Eds), Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology (pp 3-17). New York. Oxford University Press.

Valle, R.S , & Halling, S (1989). Existential-phenomenological thought. In R S Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology. Exploring the breadth of human experience (pp 3-16) New York. Plenum Press

Williams, J.M , & Leffingwall, T.R. (1996) Cognitive strategies in sport and exercise psychology. In J.L. Van Raalte & B W. Brewer (Eds.), Exploring sport and exercise psychology (pp. 51-73). Washington D.C · American Psychological Association

Wrisberg, C.A , & Pein, R. L. (1990). Past running experience as a mediator of the attentional focus of male and female recreational runners Perceptual and Motor Skills, 70, 427-432.

Zajonc, R B (1965). Social facilitation. Science, 149, 269-274

Appendices

Appendix A

Novice Runners' Experiences of Their First Race Statement of Informed Consent

This is a research study on novice runners' experiences of their first race and is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my thesis requirement. During this interview, I will ask you to talk about some of the experiences you had during your first race. This interview will be conducted in a private room in Room 135 of the HPER Building, and it will last approximately thirty-five to forty minutes. The interview will be audio taped, transcribed by me, and transformed into thematic categories. Whatever you say will be kept strictly confidential and used only for research purposes. At no time will your identity be revealed in published reports without your permission. In addition, I may wish to conduct a later half-hour follow-up interview if I need additional information. Only university members of the research team will have access to the transcribed interviews. The audiotapes and transcripts that are used for this study will be stored at the University of Tennessee for 3 years past the completion of this study. Then the audiotapes will be erased and the transcripts will be destroyed

Your participation in this study is based solely on your interest and, thus, it is voluntary. If you have questions about the study and/or your participation, please call Karen M. Appleby, M S , 144 HPER Building, at 974-8768. Once the study is completed, I will discuss the findings with you.

I,_____(print name), understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice, and still obtain information about the study results in a later meeting.

Signed_____Date:

Witnessed_____ Date:

Appendix B

Novice Athletes' Experiences of Their First Race
Interviewer Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____(print name), am taking part in the Novice
Runners' Experiences of Their First Race project

I understand that as an interviewer in this project, I am expected to maintain the
confidentiality of the persons I interview to the best of my ability. I understand that I
may have access to personal and private information in the course of this project. I agree
to treat this information in the way that I would want personal information about myself
treated.

I will treat all information about the participants I interview as confidential. I will not
discuss the information given me by participants with anyone other than project staff I
will keep the identities of participants strictly confidential, unless they have consented to
have their names used in the report.

The issue of confidentially has been discussed with me and I agree to the terms of this
agreement.

Signed:

Date:

Approved.

Date:

VITA

Karen Appleby was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on September 17, 1976 She graduated from Pike High School in June 1994 and in August of that same year, Karen began her formal collegiate education at Hanover College, a small Liberal Arts school in Southern Indiana. During her years at Hanover, she studied English and Secondary Education She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in degree in English with an emphasis in Secondary Education in May of 1998

In the Fall of 1998, she entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and in the Summer of 1999, officially received her Master of Science degree in Human Performance and Physical Activity with an emphasis in Sport Management Her academic and personal experiences during that year prompted her interest in Sport Psychology and, in the Fall of 1999, Karen, once again, entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville with the intention of pursuing her Master of Science degree in Human Performance and Sport Studies with an emphasis in Sport Psychology

Karen's future plans are dynamic and flexible. They include pursuing her doctorate in Sport Psychology while continuing her exploration of the experience of runners and extreme athletes, and gender issues in sport. Karen also plans to continue creating, managing, and marketing the climbing company NRG, a small grass-roots business that she and her husband co-created. She will graduate with her Master of Science degree with an emphasis in Sport Psychology in August 2000