

**EXPLORING MASTERS ATHLETE SWIMMERS' PERSPECTIVES ON AGING
AND HEALTH THROUGH INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION**

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Dedication

“Education is the most powerful weapon in which you can use to change the world” –

Nelson Mandela

To those who supported my perseverance through graduate school to achieve a Master of Science, thank you. I dedicate this master’s thesis to a better understanding of the aging body and mind and to prolonging a healthier lifestyle. It is my motivation to age like you.

Abstract

Investigating Masters sport is important as it presents a unique context to explore physical activity participation by extending beyond the regular parameters of physical activity engagement in older adults. This study utilizes an Interpretive Description methodology conducted through semi-structured interviews with 10 Masters athlete swimmers aged 60 years and older. The findings of this study suggest that physical activity promotion in older adulthood needs to be affordable, accessible, and culturally accepted. The Masters athlete swimmers involved in this research study discussed areas that contributed to their participation including, privilege and willingness to be a member in the club, the ability to resist ageist stereotypes, and experienced support to be engaged in a Masters swim club. The sport of swimming encourages the ability to navigate multiple understandings of what it means to be a physically active older adult and how that influences their aging experiences.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Population Aging

Alberta's older adult population is expected to increase in the coming decades due to lower birth rates and longer life expectancies (Statistics Canada, 2016a). There are over 370,000 adults aged 65 and older in Alberta currently and by 2031 this number is estimated to double as baby boomers age. This demographic reality will have profound and lasting economic and social implications and therefore will require action from governments, the non-profit and private sectors, communities, families, and individuals to sustain this population (Government of Alberta, 2010). The reality is that as this population grows and ages policy makers will be confronted with challenges of maintaining the vitality and functional independence of older adults (Naaldenberg, Vaandrager, Koelen, & Leeuwis, 2011).

Benefits of Physical Activity

A plethora of evidence demonstrates the role of physical activity in improving health and well-being for individuals. In fact, being regularly physically active is considered an essential component to healthy aging as it can reduce many health problems that are associated with age (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Regular physical activity can help reduce chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and premature death while helping to maintain functional independence, mobility, improve fitness, improve or maintain body weight, maintain bone health, maintain mental health, and to feel better (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015; Dionigi, 2005, 2011; Gayman, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, Horton, & Baker, 2017; Grant, 2001; Medic, 2007; Naaldenberg, 2012; Phoenix, 2007).

Canada's national physical activity guidelines for older adults (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology [CSEP], 2016) state that to achieve health benefits and to improve functional independence, adults aged 65 or older should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity to improve health and mobility. Despite national recommendations and clear evidence of the benefits of physical activity, physical activity participation among older adults remains low; only 11% of Canadian adults aged 60 to 79 meet the physical activity guidelines (Statistics Canada, 2016b). These relatively high rates of physical inactivity are a major public health issue (Prohaska et al., 2006), as it increases the risk and rise of chronic diseases, premature mortality, and other health ailments that could be predicted and prevented with a physically active lifestyle.

Relevance to Public Health

The increasing and alarming rate of older adults' physical inactivity is a major public health concern, as it affects the healthy aging of older adults and it increases our preventable healthcare costs (Prohaska et al., 2006). Prohaska et al. call for the strengthening of public health efforts to promote physical activity among older adults. The outcomes of sedentary behaviour and chronic illnesses demonstrate the public health significance of physical activity.

An upstream approach is needed to focus on strengthening social norms and environments that support healthy behaviour. Public health messages at national and international levels suggest that physical activity may be a solution to the problem of becoming aged (Pike, 2011). Therefore, research into the effectiveness of upstream

strategies is required if we expect to have evidence-based change that supports population-level activity promotion for older adults.

The Phenomenon of Masters Athletes

Operationalization. Masters athletes are generally defined as individuals who continue to train and compete, typically at a high level, in later life (Baker, Horton & Weir, 2010).

Overview and Relevance

Masters sport presents a unique context for physical activity participation as it extends beyond the regular parameters of physical activity engagement in older adults by providing unique opportunities for individuals to be healthy in older adulthood (Baker et al., 2010). Masters athletes deviate from the typical profile of aging and the corresponding framing of aging as physical and cognitive decline (Baker, Horton & Weir, 2010). Masters athletes are important to study due to their ability to diminish popular stereotypes of aging (Baker, Horton & Weir, 2010). Thus, research conducted on Masters athletes that explores their perspectives on aging and health specifically can improve understanding of how active living and well-being in later life can be enhanced across the lifespan. Furthermore, Masters athletes can also be viewed as role models and combatants of negative stereotypes of aging resisting the notion of aging being solely described as a biomedical problem (Dionigi, 2006a).

If older adults cast later life in a different light, they can often consider themselves an exception to the commonly accepted mores of aging, which can in turn influence feelings of satisfaction and personal empowerment and can help them to resist the negative stereotypes of aging and redefine those experiences that can influence pride,

pleasure, and ability (Dionigi, 2006b). Older adults have an opportunity to deconstruct, negotiate, reflect, mobilize, conform to, and resist the accepted beliefs surrounding aging from an individual and a social level. High level sport enables older adults to challenge social norms and stereotypes while remaining in a world that was once thought to be exclusive to the elite, young, and fit (Kirby & Kluge, 2013). These physical activity outlets give older adults the ability to develop and identify within an aging framework of healthy and active aging. Masters athletes have begun to understand this and to create positive versions of aging instead (Watson, Oghene, Quartiroli, Schinke, & McGannon, 2015).

Indeed, Masters athletes have expressed mantras such as “I’m out here and I can do this” and “Use it or lose it” that positively encourage reflections of their aging (Dionigi, 2006a). The mantras that many athletes have followed demonstrate that aging is more than just a set of discourses and show the negotiations of physiological and psychological realities of an aging identity. Older adults aged 60+ are frequently viewed by society for what they cannot do rather than what they can achieve, with the focus upon decline, disengagement, and hopelessness (Dionigi, 2006; Kirby & Kluge, 2013). Understanding an aging identity versus an aging stereotype helps older adults negotiate and manage a positive aging identity while feeling empowered (Dionigi, 2006a).

The literature suggests that through sports participation Masters athletes express powerful and active images of old age and challenge the passive and dependent depictions in society (Dionigi, 2015). There is compelling evidence that suggests that Masters sport involvement can be a strategy for managing the aging process. However, this is still an under-studied area (Dionigi, 2015). Masters athletes represent a population of the most physically fit and healthy individuals who generally have reduced risks of

chronic disease or other physical disabilities which may otherwise serve as a barrier to their participation (Baker et al., 2010).

Baker et al. (2010) suggest that sport involvement represents a primary adaptive strategy for coping with the process of aging as it can enhance one's social relationships, the development of personal identity, and general propensity of lifelong physical activity. Masters sport is a way to maintain a physically active, healthy, competitive, and socially engaged life while delaying the onset, or completely avoiding, ill health, disability, loneliness, and dependency in old age. It is also a strategy to monitor, adapt, fight, avoid, and/or accept the aging process for individuals. The development of this phenomenon has introduced me to the various benefits of athletic competition in older adulthood, yet there remain limitations in the literature related to ageist stereotypes, gender differences, variable socioeconomic status, and elitist perspectives as an athlete. Therefore further exploration is needed to understand the impacts that cognitive, emotional, social, and motivational outcomes influence the experiences of aging and physical activity and the influences of psychological and psychosocial behaviours.

What Can We Learn From Masters Swimmers?

Masters swimmers are important to understand because of the many reasons they choose to engage in this sport in later life. For example, Stevenson (2002) reports that Masters swimmers claimed that being a swimmer played a significant role in their self-identification. The social and personal factors of a group sport attract individuals to Masters swimming and embed a deeper commitment to swimming through continued participation. Stevenson (2002) suggests that understanding the experience of Masters

swimmers would inform beliefs about aging and inform how this has influenced their participation in sport.

Swimming may be particularly appealing to older adults due to its low impact relative to other sports. Masters swimming presents a unique case to be studied because this is an activity that can be engaged in for a lifetime (Pike, 2011; Stevenson, 2002). Swimming is an important form of physical activity for older adults as it can relieve pain. This indicates that it can be engaged by many older adults despite pre-existing health conditions. In fact, in some instances, exercising in an aquatic environment can alleviate these conditions (Pike, 2011; Stevenson, 2002; Wigglesworth, Young, Medic, & Grove, 2012).

Purpose

Given the foregoing, the purpose of this study is to, through the use of interpretive description, explore Masters athlete swimmers' beliefs about aging and health. For the purposes of this study, Masters athlete swimmers are defined as individuals age 60 years or older who continue to train and participate in a Masters Swim Club (Baker, Horton & Weir, 2010).

Research Questions

This Master's study is guided by the following overarching research question and sub-questions:

- *Central research question:* How do Masters athlete swimmers navigate multiple understandings of aging and physical activity?
- *Sub-question 1:* How do beliefs about aging influence swimming participation?

- *Sub-question 2: How does swimming participation influence Masters swimmers' experiences of, and beliefs about, aging?*

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following review of literature presents the findings from research studies that directly inform this Master's thesis related to physical activity and aging. This chapter is condensed into three sections: Section I reviews studies that contribute to understanding the nature of older adult physical activity and sport participation respectively and is organized by topics on adherence and self-efficacy; Section II reviews studies that focus on Masters sport participation and is organized by topics on physical activity and ageist stereotypes, support, and redefining aging and sport; Section III focuses on studies which focus on Masters swimming and is organized by topics on adherence and perceptions, and motivation. The literature review is divided into these sub-sections to highlight some of the salient factors that influence older adults' physical activity participation. A section solely dedicated to Masters swimmers emphasizes a current gap in the literature. The physiological studies of Masters athlete participation is beyond the scope of this review as this study is based on the qualitative experiences of what influences an older adult to be involved in a Masters sport.

Section I – Older Adult Physical Activity and Sport Participation

Adherence. Adherence rates are explored by Gray, Murphy, Gallagher & Simpson (2016), as they relate to motives and barriers to physical activity among older adults with differing socioeconomic statuses. “The theoretical tenets of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and self-efficacy theory, a subtheory of Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), were used in the current research” (p. 419). Their research included a sample of four focus groups with 28 older adults from two different socioeconomic status groups (I.e. low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic

status). Participants in both high and low socioeconomic status groups were predominantly female (71.4% and 85.7% respectively). The education attainment was significantly different ($p < .001$) among the two groups with the high socioeconomic status group educated to a tertiary level (85.7%) and low socioeconomic status group educated only to a primary level (78.6%). These findings indicated that the health benefits of physical activity were enjoyment, the opportunity to socialize, and social support. This study is relevant to my research as it addresses adherence of physical activity among older adults with differing SES, which is a concern towards participation in Masters clubs.

Self-reported adherence rates to physical activity in adults aged 65-75 is investigated by Visser, Brychta, Chen, & Koster (2014) in a longitudinal aging study. Participants (N=138) complete a lifestyle questionnaire and wear an accelerometer for one week. The accelerometer is used to objectively measure physical activity including time spent in moderate to vigorous activity. These activities could include brisk walking or running; lifestyle-oriented activities such as vacuuming and sweeping were also included. The variables of self-reported measurement included sex, date of birth, education level, body weight, number of chronic diseases, and walking performance score. The results of this study indicate that more than half (56.8%) of the participants report adherence to physical activity in 5-minute bouts. Whereas, based on their accelerometer, this percentage was only 24.6%. For those who report to adhere to physical activity, approximately 65.3% did not report through accelerometer measures. Participant characteristics were compared between correct and incorrect reports of adherence to physical activity recommendation. Those who incorrectly reported their adherence were more likely to be older women ($p = .007$) who had poor walking

performance ($p = .02$), low social support ($p=.04$), and low self-efficacy ($p= .09$). These results indicate that barriers to adherence rates to physical activity are prevalent among specific subgroups of older adults and contributes to the relevance of understanding Masters sport participation to all older adult groups.

Self-efficacy. Adherence rates to physical activity are further influenced through individuals' self-efficacy and the motivation to be physically active. Caudroit, Stephan, Chalabaev, & Le Scanff (2012) examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between subjective age and intention to engage in physical activity among active older adults. The design of this study is cross-sectional and includes 170 adults aged 60 – 80 years. These participants complete measures of subjective age, self-efficacy, behavioural intention, self-rated health, and past physical activity measures. Results indicate a positive relationship between subjective age and physical activity intention ($p < .01$). These findings suggest that feeling younger than one's actual age is associated to higher physical activity engagement as this is associated with feelings of confidence in the ability to exercise. An explanation for this relationship is the increase in positive self-enhancing illusions, which can promote optimistic beliefs about one's physical abilities and can lead to adopting behaviours that are counter-stereotypical of older adults. Furthermore, the relationships between subjective age, self-efficacy, and intention are significant determinants of self-efficacy. This study is relevant to my research since it explores aging experiences as it relates to physical activity and the power of diminishing ageist stereotypes.

The attitudes toward physical activity among older adults further explore their participation rates, building off adherence and self-efficacy. Leavy and Aberg's (2010) qualitative study in Ireland and Sweden observing physical activity rates among by

community-dwelling older adults in Dublin and Stockholm consists of thirty interviews with individuals 65 years and older living in their own homes, and functionally independent in activities of daily living. Descriptive data such as, age, height, weight, family status, and educational background is also obtained in each interview. The perceptions of physical activity held by older adults is described in three sections: perceived physical activity levels, perceptions of physical activity, and lifespan perspectives of physical activity. The perceptions of physical activity include the self, lifestyle changes over time, identification through work, social contact, out in nature, awareness of health recommendations, dealing with chronic disease, and beliefs about health effects of exercise. The findings of this study indicate that there are wide variations of how older adults perceive physical activity. However, for these participants, physical activity is about their self-identity. This study is relevant to my research as it uncovers the perceptions of physical activity rates among older adults and what contributes to their adherence to be physically active.

Kostelli, Williams, & Cumming (2016) research the psychosocial determinants of physical activity among older adults. The objective of their qualitative research approach is to focus on the psychosocial determinants of physical activity following retirement. The Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Kostelli et al., 2016) is utilized to better understand the thoughts from older adults pre- and post-retirement along with the reasons for differences in activity levels and how physical activity is incorporated into daily life after retirement. This research study includes seven focus groups of adults aged 54 – 79 years with a range of physical activity levels and retirement length. Twenty-six participants report engaging in moderate to vigorous physical activity levels for more than 2.5 hours per week, while 11 report being significantly inactive. The findings of this

study indicate that subjective health status and time perception are related to the belief in their ability to remain physically active throughout retirement. Therefore, perceived poor health and lack of time indicate less confidence to sustain physical activity in retirement. This study is relevant to my research as it further explains the barriers that are faced among older adult populations to be physically active.

Section II - Masters Athletes

Physical Activity and Ageist Stereotypes. To understand stereotypes and physical activity the narrative of decline that dominates the aging process and how older adults resist this narrative, Phoenix and Smith (2011) obtain in-depth life stories from thirteen mature (age 50-73) natural bodybuilders. The narrative of decline is conceptualized as storylines of the inevitable physical decline among older adults' body and movement. The stereotypical assumptions about decline and deterioration do not fit with the participants' experience. Rather, participants tell counter-stories to "natural" aging indicating their resistance to the narrative of decline and demonstrates participants' level of resistance (Phoenix & Smith, 2011). These athletes are reluctant to view aging as a reason to disengage with sport and exercise. This study is relevant to my research as it introduces how older athletes have the ability to disengage from and resist ageist stereotypes because of their participation in physical activity.

Engaging with sport and exercise introduces a sense of identity for individuals, Dionigi (2002) explores this notion of resisting ageist stereotypes and introducing an aging identity and how that affects older adults. Dionigi (2002) looks at the leisure and identity management in later life by interviewing 110 Masters athletes aged 55 – 94 years old competing in the 8th Australian Masters Games through an exploratory inquiry

qualitative research design. Two major themes emerge from her study: competitive sport as a strategy for adapting to older age and as a context for expressing youthfulness.

Adapting to older age is represented by the following quote: “I’m out here and I can do this” (p. 7). Participants considered their involvement in competitive sport to have various positive impacts on their lives. These positive impacts include opportunities for friendship, travel, fitness, and enjoyment. The second theme of expressing youthfulness is represented by the following quote: “It keeps us young” (p. 9). Participants are seen to embody this theme through their words, behaviour, and clothing. A majority of participants believe that her or his participation in sport “keeps you feeling young” which is “younger at heart” and “mind” (p. 10). Dionigi (2002) finds that a positive aging identity for older adults offers a challenge to the stereotypes of older age and conforming to the ideals of youthfulness. The relevance to my research from this study includes how older adults are able to engage in a positive aging identity and how that is influenced by physical activity.

Kirby and Kluge (2013) also explore the experiences of stereotypes in older adult athletes. Their intrinsic case study examines a women’s volleyball team 65 years and older at a university to explore the experiences of older women to learn a new sport and how participating in competitive sport affects those who had not previously considered themselves athletic. This qualitative study explores participant’s experiences through focus groups, individual interviews, observational notes, and written reflections. The overall organization of this inquiry study is through ethnographic methods. Three broad themes emerge from the team member data, which includes going for the gusto, being a member of the team, and support from the university. Some of the subthemes include learning a new skill in later life is fun, exciting, and challenging; willing to try what peers

are afraid to attempt; role reversal—being cheered on by their children and grandchildren. The women in this study discuss that their experience is fun, challenging, and rewarding, and that they are contradicting the ‘norm.’ These women appear to want to fight the aging narrative and continue their participation in sport as an older adult (Kirby & Kluge, 2013). Furthermore, this study is relevant to my research as it explores how ageist stereotypes can be diminished through sport participation among older adults.

Support. Older adults are able to diminish ageist stereotypes further by feeling a sense of support to be engaged in physical activity. Dionigi and Lyons (2007) conducted a qualitative study exploring the meanings of community among older adults who compete in Masters sport. Field observations and informal interviews were conducted on 110 Masters athletes participating in the 8th Australian Masters Games. Four themes emerge from this study: shared sporting interest, comrades in continued activity, relevant life purpose, and giving back. The findings of the study allude that leisure-related experiences of the community setting are described to be episodic, emotional, and fleeting and provide little towards sustained experiences of community. Dionigi and Lyons recommend that further research should explore the way feelings of community can be shaped and influenced through organizational decisions which would greatly benefit the older adults participating in sport and physical activity. This study highlights the relevance to my research of why older adults continue to be engaged in physical activity if they feel a sense of support among their networks.

In addition to a sense of support and community, understanding the leisure aspects of participating in sport in later life is important to promote this lifestyle to many. Therefore, to determine the leisure pursuit of older adults and competitive sport, Dionigi (2005) interviewed 28 older Australian Masters Games athletes aged 60 – 89 years old.

This study looks at motives and experiences of Masters athletes and explores how a group of these older adults negotiate conflicting discourses around sport and aging. Field observations and short semi-structured interviews that are conducted at the 2001 Australian Masters Games reveal four major themes: friendship and fun, competition, youthfulness, and the aging body. However, the theme of relevance to this article is based on competition which was further presented into two sections: competing to win, and a competitive spirit. This particular attention towards competition looks to understand how they negotiate the physically demanding competitive behaviour that goes against the grain. The findings indicate alternative ways of understanding leisure behaviour in later life and raise questions about beliefs of sport and aging in Western society. Furthermore, this study has the potential to raise the value of the aging population and inspire future generations to participate in this lifestyle. This study is relevant to my research as it explores further reasoning to be engaged in a Masters club as an older adult and how feelings of support are a large motivating factor.

Redefining Aging and Sport. Dionigi and O’Flynn (2007) explore how Masters athletes use performance discourses to define their sport participation within a poststructural framework. The poststructural understanding of knowledge and the self is found through analyzing the talk and actions of older athletes (Foucault, 1982). Dionigi and O’Flynn’s (2007) study is conducted with 138 participants, aged 55 – 94, at the 8th Australian Masters Games. The findings of the study indicate that performance discourses redefine what it meant to be an older athlete and reveal normalized constructs of the acceptable older athlete. Four themes emerge from the multiple meanings that older athletes attach to their experiences in physical demanding competitive sport: friendship and fun, competition, youthfulness, and the aging body. These themes express health-

promotional perspectives of fitness constructs and physical activity as worthwhile and beneficial. Dionigi and O’Flynn indicate further research should focus on the extent that older adults engage with performance, fitness, and competitive discourses in other aspects of their lives, and the possible effects of this participation and engagement. This study is relevant to my research as it explores how older adults are able to redefine aging and sport to increase participation among this population.

Extending Dionigi’s research further, Baker and Horton (2013) focus on the negotiations of the aging process through sport participation. This study draws up participants’ personal stories from 44 World Masters Games athletes (23 women and 21 men) aged 56 – 90 years. The four themes that emerge through this study include: “There’s no such thing as old (a story of avoiding old age)”; “Keep Moving (a story of fighting the aging process)”; “Fun, Fitness, Friendship and Competing (a story of redefining self and old age)”; and “Making the most of your life... with the capabilities that you still have (a story of adaptation and acceptance).” These four themes discover that sport participation of older athletes can influence resistance, redefining, and acceptance of the aging process. The stories of the participants allow for alternative meanings of the dominant declining body narrative of aging to form. The narratives present the possibility for personal, pedagogical, and social transformation. Furthermore, a common finding is that continued participation in sport is the primary means to delay the process of aging. As mentioned above, this study is relevant to my research as it explores how aging can be redefined in relation to sport participation among older adults.

Section III - Masters Swimmers

Adherence and Perceptions. Wigglesworth, Young, Medic, & Grove (2012) recognize the age related decline in involvement and adherence among middle-aged and

older adults. Their study focuses on the gender differences in the determinants of Masters swimmers' sport commitment. This quantitative study examines the commitment determinants and the differences among determinants for predicting functional and obligatory commitment. The method of this study is questionnaires distributed to participants at the 2008 FINA (Federation Internationale de Natation) Masters Aquatics World Championships that were held in Australia. Participants include a total of 507 (235 male; 272 female). The mean age of participants is 51.5 years of age. The three functional commitment items include the degree to which participants were dedicated, determined, and committed to their sport. The questions of the survey measure Masters swimmers' perceptions of sport involvement and sport commitment related to their primary sport of swimming. The questionnaire items are based on scales that had proven reliable and valid in sport commitment research with younger cohorts. This study indicates that even though males and females both have high levels of functional commitment, males report higher for obligatory commitment. These results indicate that males on average had a higher sense of having to continue sport involvement in a less non-volitional way than females. This study is relevant to my research as it begins to introduce the desire to be dedicated to the sport of swimming as an older adult.

Further into adherence and perceptions, Medic, Young, & Grove (2013) research competitive Masters swimmers related to the first and fifth constituents years of a 5-year age category. They survey swimmers that are in between 35 and 93 years of age (154 male; 184 female) at the 2008 World FINA Masters Championships. Five factors are found to be important for preparation, attendance, and success at Masters competitions: awareness of advantages, expectancy, motivation training, and physiological capacity. This study reveals that Masters swimmers are conscious of advantages that 5-year age

categories afford to relatively younger cohorts. Furthermore, the first compared to the fifth of an age category finds that they have greater physiological capacity, engage in more training, have higher expectations to perform well, and are more motivated. These findings further point to the psychosocial and physical factors that help to explain why relatively young Masters athletes are more likely to perform better and participate in Masters competitions compared to the older adult Masters athletes. This study is relevant to my research as it compares older adult athletes to younger adult athletes and their rates and perceptions of participation. This will allow further understanding of who these Masters swimmers are and how their participation is understood.

Motivation. Participation in a swim club is further understood through older adults' motivations to be engaged in the sport. Petracovschi (2011) investigates Masters athlete swimmers' motivations for participation and the perceived benefits. This study focuses on 45 participants (28 male and 17 female) between the ages of 18 and 84 competing in a Masters swimming competition held in Timisoara, Romania. The focus of this study is to consider the reasons for participation in Masters swimming competition and the benefits gained for the participant. Participants are asked to respond to a survey which includes thirty-one items including reasons for practicing Masters swimming. The questions include personal information about the Masters athletes such as age, sex, level of education, marital status, etc., and data on the involvement in Masters swimming such as participation in competitions, the reasons for participation, etc. Participants' reasons for participating in Masters swimming include leisure, socialization, relaxation, winning, testing the limits, health care, and therapy. The effects of participating identified include visiting, socialization, the need to compete with others, the need to improve personal records, the need to test physical capacity, and other. This study includes a sample of

participants who have participated in sport through their adolescent years up until being an older adult, which helps to understand a sense of self-motivation among this group. Masters swimming is still a sporting group that is under-researched, especially in Romania. This study is relevant to my research as it describes specific motivating factors to be engaged in Masters swimming as an older adult.

Pike (2011) examines the stories of Masters swimmers over the age of 60 and identifies the motivating factors that influence their participation within sport. A multi-method approach is used with the combination of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and written stories. The study draws upon thirty-one swimmers' stories, 18 male and 13 female, with a mean age of 65. Three main themes are identified. First, swimming provides a regular pattern of living in retirement, replacing the structure of their working lives in their post-work lifestyles. The second theme of access to economic capital, enabled consumption of social, and corporeal capital through swimming challenges the perceptions of the burden and dependency of older adults. The economic capital or financial support/ability in swimming participation is related to the social status of its members. The engagement in swimming is a form of resistance to the aging body but has provided a sense of youth. The findings suggest that participating in swimming challenges perceptions of burden and dependency of older adults. More specifically, swimming appears to facilitate the development of a socially desirable identity, and is used as a form of resistance to the negative discourse of an aging body. This study is relevant to my research as it explored how swimming facilitated the development of an aging identity as it relates to being physically active.

Furthermore, focusing on the experiences of older adult Masters swimmers, Rathwell, Callary, and Young (2015) adopt a narrative approach to understand the context

of coached Masters swimmers aged 45 – 65 years old. The purpose of the study is to understand the important psychosocial themes of motivation from the perspective of Masters swimmers involved in a day-to-day swimming environment. The study reveals four emerging themes that represented the athletes: motives for swimming, perspectives on competition, experiences specific to being a Masters swimmer, and perspectives on being coached. These four themes and their subthemes are considered the telling of each narrative and a different expressive emphasis on each of the themes. The swimmer profiles include: Social Sally – the socially-oriented swimmer; Striving Stephanie – the striving-oriented swimmer; and Controlling Connor – the control-oriented swimmer. The narratives that represent each profile are quotes ascribed to different participants. The purpose is to provide rich in-depth information about psychosocial conditions specific to the conditions of coached swimmers. The narrative stories of several profiles are based on their experiences and the environment then analyzed in three narrative profiles such as motives for swimming, perspectives on competition, and experiences specific to being a Masters swimmer. All themes are couched within the context of being coached. This study is relevant to my research as it explores the motivation and desirability behind choosing a sport that is coordinated through a coach.

The aspect of being coached is additional to Masters swimmers motives and participation; however, to understand this aspect without the focus of the environment of coaching, Dionigi (2006) conducted a review that gives insight into the experiences and motives of older athletes. To promote the need for qualitative sociological research with participation in competitive sport and aging populations, Dionigi argues that most of these studies rely on quantitative methodologies and are primarily from a sport-psychology perspective and therefore do not consider the sociocultural factors that

influence the reasons why older adults compete in sport. The studies do not show how the motives or issues interact, what meanings older adults ascribe to them, or the ways in which older adults negotiate the complexities and contradictions that influence their behaviour (Dionigi, 2011). Based upon the previous research, Dionigi (2011) reinforces the importance of qualitative methodologies carried out from within an interpretive paradigm as research carried out in this manner would have greatly contributed to broadening the understanding of competitive sport and aging. Dionigi (2006) finds two emerging themes from the review the words and actions of older athletes: “I’m out here and I can do this” (p. 185) and “Use it or lose it” (p. 187). The qualitative methods will further help us understand the reasons of participating in sport in later life and why we should promote this lifestyle for future generations, a relevant aspect to my research study.

Literature Review Summary

Based upon the literature reviewed, the research focusses on the experiences of Masters athletes including the reasons for participation, understanding an active and athletic identity, what it is like to be coached, and the context of motivation as it relates to being an older adult. These studies highlight the important focuses on older adults participating in sport in later life, incorporating an exercise regime on a regular basis, and how the exercise physiology of sport has influenced their health. This research encourages an understanding of this phenomenon for many applications including in government, and for community members, stakeholders, health professionals, and of course researchers.

The studies conducted on Masters athletes and Masters swimmers give us a glimpse into understanding the multiple aspects of being a physically active older adult. Understanding motivation and social aspects of participating in sport and physical activity in later life allow us to gain more of an understanding of this unique group of individuals. It allows researchers to further explore older athletes and how we can encourage other populations to adapt this healthy lifestyle and encourage a healthier aging population. The understanding of Masters athletes will lead to many benefits to the health care system including reducing preventable health care costs and increasing the overall health and well-being of older adults.

Research on Masters athletes has been predominantly understood through quantitative measures. These measures encourage the understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to being an older Masters athlete. However, much like older adult physical activity determinants and adherence rates, research is needed to explore the experiences related to identifying as a Masters athlete without the focus of competition and how these experiences differ. Furthermore, further research is needed to identify the factors that influence older adults to be engaged in the sport of swimming for a longer period of time than other physically demanding sports.

The main overarching research gap is considered to be the lack of understanding of the psychosocial factors that influence sport and physical activity participation among older adults. It is important that researchers start to pursue further qualitative understanding of the phenomenon of non-Masters and Masters athletes and their aging process. This is so that we can provide the older adult population with the necessities and support that is needed to maintain this healthy lifestyle and increase the health promotion movement. Upon reviewing the above studies of Masters athletes, Masters swimmers, and

participation of older adults in physical activity the overarching critique is the concern that a large portion of the data on these athletes was obtained in Australia at one competition among all Masters athletes. As researchers looking to understand this population and its constructs and contexts, we must look to other parts of the world and to other competitive and non-competitive environments. Therefore, my research study will address this by looking specifically at the participation of Masters swimmers in Western Canada.

Chapter Three: Method

This chapter outlines the epistemological assumptions underpinning my research, the theoretical perspective from which this study is undertaken, the methodological approach employed, and the method used to obtain the data. Qualitative studies critically require a methodological framework, to provide justification by discussing the reason for the selection of a particular method in research (Avis, 2003). The methodology will describe the strategy, plan of action, process or design, use of particular methods, and the desired outcomes. The method will describe the techniques and procedures I used to gather and analyze the data, while the theoretical perspective will describe philosophical underpinning that inform the methodology and the epistemology expressing the theory of knowledge.

Conceptual/theoretical background

The goal of a conceptual framework is to understand and describe the concepts that are relevant to the study and the relationships among them (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). The conceptual framework relates concepts, empirical research, and theories to advance and systematize knowledge of related issues or concepts. Maxwell (2013) describes a conceptual framework as the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support or inform the research under study. I will describe in the following sections the factors that influence my conceptual framework for my study.

Epistemology. This study was approached from within a constructionist perspective - recognizing that all knowledge and reality is contingent upon human practices, constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998). As the

word suggests, meaning for a constructionist is not discovered but constructed.

Constructionism claims that human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Meaning or truth cannot be described simply as objective or subjective (Crotty, 1998). Crotty suggested that the use of constructionism should be where the focus includes the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning. The distinction between constructionism and constructivism is important as these terms can often be interrelated. However, Crotty distinguishes that constructivism focuses on the epistemological considerations that focus exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind (1998). Due to this distinction, I approached this study from within a constructionist perspective.

My data analysis approach of thematic data analysis states that conducting research within a constructionist perspective does not seek a focus towards individual psychologies and motivations rather to theorize the sociocultural contexts, such as discourses of privilege that enable individual accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The constructionist epistemological perspective has been under-utilized in the masters athlete domain (Dionigi, 2006). By adopting this perspective, this study was sensitive to the subjective experiences of masters athlete swimmers and explored how they make sense of their realities. As constructivism assumes a relativist ontological perspective which assumes multiple realities, the focus of constructionist epistemological perspective as viewing knowledge as constructed or made up rather than already out there, aligned more positively with my phenomena of study. This epistemological perspective is recommended to be used when the focus is on generation and transmission of meaning (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, my study's purpose, which is to explore masters athlete swimmers' beliefs about aging and health will be guided through a constructionist

epistemological framework, as the desire to understand the constructed meanings behind physical activity and aging is the phenomena of interest.

Theoretical perspective. An interpretivist perspective views knowledge as socially constructed and produced (Dharamsi, 2009). A theoretical perspective of interpretivism is complimentary to my epistemology of constructionism, as each of their focus is on the social construction of experiences. The interpretivist approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (Crotty, 1998). This theoretical perspective attempts to represent the world from multiple perspectives of participants, while considering that all knowledge is fundamentally subjective and interactive (Markula, 2001; Schwandt, 2000; Weber, 1949). An interpretivist perspective indicates that, “the important reality is what people perceive it to be” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.3). Therefore, the goal of this perspective is to “understand social life by taking into account meaning and the interpretive process of social actors” (Jaffe & Miller, 1994, p. 52). As my thesis looked to understand the stories of masters athlete swimmers, an interpretivist theoretical perspective aided in my ability to uncover the processes and interactions these individuals face within the phenomena of interest.

Methodology. My theoretical perspective complements the methodology of interpretive description to guide data collection and analysis processes of this study. Interpretive description provided a “thematic summary or conceptual description” of the phenomena of interest (Thorne, 2008, p. 164). Therefore, interpretive description is a desired methodology as it extends beyond the mere description of the phenomena of interest, and furthermore critiques three fundamental methodologies of, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Thorne, 2008). Interpretive description is a

strategy to illuminate, articulate, and disseminate knowledge that resides between fact and conjecture but is of critical to applied disciplines (Thorne, 2008). None of these methodologies alone can capture all the facets of human experience, therefore interpretive description is set between and among these three methodologies (2008). The design of interpretive description allows the identification of commonalities of experiences, while being mindful of individual variation that can be applied to meaningful individual cases (2008).

As mentioned above, interpretive description is strongly influenced and borrows aspects from ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, when presenting data collection and analysis (Bertero, 2015). Thorne stated that interpretive description is a way for researchers to have the ability to liberate themselves from the strict use of normative methodologies, or as Sandelowski (2000) stated, a way to be free from the “tyranny of method” (p. 334) in favour of a less directed method. Thorne explains description as ‘telling what it is that one observed’ (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 47). Therefore, researchers are meant to explore the topic in an open fashion by: creating an empirical basis to which new questions can be generated, bringing awareness to the phenomena of interest, and taking note of the manifestations of the complex world of human health and illness. This type of description leads to the analytical question ‘what does this mean’ form of sense-making (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 48). Therefore, interpretive descriptions depends on the subjective experiences of individuals, while additionally understanding the broader patterns of the phenomenon of study (Thorne, 2008). This methodology is sensitive to the inevitable individual variations of, characteristics, patterns, and structure in a theoretically useful manner (Thorne, Kirkham, O’Flynn-Magee, 2004).

Appropriateness of Qualitative Research Methods

Kirby and Kluge (2013) suggested that an understanding of the experience of older adults who participate in competitive sport is best achieved through qualitative methods. The reasoning these authors put forth relates to the complexity and evolving nature of aging and competition; thus, not adequately assessed by conventional quantitative measures. When research focuses primarily on quantifying physical performance, functional capabilities, and psychological characteristics of older adults, the indescribable and less tangible are often suppressed or absent (Grant & Kluge, 2007).

Qualitative methods allow in-depth and meaningful description of individual and collective experiences throughout many contexts (Kirby & Kluge, 2013). The strengths associated with qualitative inquiry are related to the ability of researchers to perform as both the tool for data collection and the interpretive voice that encourages a better understanding and description of a particular phenomenon. However, despite recent calls for qualitative studies (see: Baker, Horton, Weir, 2010; Dionigi, 2006), much of the research surrounding masters athletes has utilized quantitative methods. These methods have addressed areas such as the statistical modelling of age trends, peak exercise performance, muscle strength, the effects of cardiovascular function, and injury epidemiology (Baker, Horton & Weir, 2010). Although important in their own right, these studies help illustrate the literature's predominant focus on the physiological aspects of the aging active body rather than understanding the perspectives and experiences of participation – both perspectives are of great importance. Given the foregoing, I have constructed a study to focus on obtaining data via semi-structured interviews and learning about the experiences of masters athlete swimmers, 60 years and older.

Personal Situatedness. To be able to understand the views of human experiences, I explored the ways that masters athlete swimmers believe that participation in sport influenced their aging process. The process of understanding masters athletes aging experiences as it relates to the methodology, is best understood by situating oneself in the research and acknowledging any biases. In qualitative inquiry, researchers should begin the research process with personal justifications and situatedness, which includes justifying the inquiry in the contexts of the researcher's own life experience, tensions, and personal inquiry puzzles (Clandinin, 2013). There are many reasons why personal situatedness is important to the research. For instance, situatedness encourages an understanding of ourselves as being within the phenomena of interest. Situatedness also helps one understand what brings her/him to our research puzzles. Without this reflexivity, we risk the entrance into research relationships without a sense of the stories we are living and retelling. Finally, situatedness helps us understand who is being studied, as we need to attend to the experiences of the research participants.

In relation to my own personal situatedness, my experience begins with my education and my experience with being a competitive swimmer. In addition, my undergraduate degree in public health introduced me to many disciplinary perspectives and topics that have fuelled my intellectual curiosity including health promotion, gerontology/population aging, and disease/injury prevention; and particularly older adults' physical activity. Finally, it is important that I acknowledge my ethnicity, social class, race, and gender; all affect my personal situatedness. I am a Caucasian female from a middle-class family, which has led to many privileges in life. Consistent with a constructionist perspective, it is important to situate oneself within the research process as

it acknowledges one cannot approach a study objectively. As a result, ones experiences impact the approach and interpretations of any scholarly inquiry.

Data Collection

Data were constructed via in-person semi-structured interviews 60 – 90 minutes in duration, conducted by myself, and were audio/digitally recorded (*Appendix B*). I chose semi-structured interviews, as I did not want my participants to feel the experience was rigid and to offer an open space to express their experiences in a way that was meaningful for them. I wanted their story to be influenced by their realities, rather than forced through my pre-conceived inquiries. I had hoped to transcribe each of the interviews in order of data collection, however at times when I had multiple interviews at once I was not able to consecutively transcribe the interviews. Therefore I ensured my field notes were sufficiently detailed to allow for the data to remain present in my mind. The interviews occurred in a location the participant deemed convenient, examples of locations were, their house, the sports facility they are members of, and coffee shops.

Sample size. Interpretive description is a methodology that has the ability to be represented by almost any size (Thorne, 2008). Patton states, “Qualitative inquiry seems to work best for people with high tolerance for ambiguity” (Patton, 2002, p. 242) and sample size is a case in point. However, the vast majority of research within this approach are likely to be relatively small, such as five to thirty participants (Thorne, 2008). Thorne further explains that, “the best way to justify a sample size is to generate a rationale that is consistent with the research question” (p. 94). The nature of my research design was to explore the aging and physical activity experiences and beliefs of a unique group in society, which requires a less extensive sample as these participants uphold

specific characteristics (i.e., 60 years and older, participating in a masters swim club) valued to the study (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016). Furthermore, Morse (2002) identifies that a sample is deemed sufficient when participants who best represent the research topic have been included.

The sample size I concluded was a range of 10 to 12 participants, following a purposeful sampling approach, which is further discussed below in participant recruitment. In this regard, recruiting a purposeful sample of 10 masters swimmers 60 years and older was considered justifiable as the goal was not to compare older adult physical activity experiences and beliefs to those of a younger age demographic but rather to capture experiences of aging and physical activity in the sport of swimming specifically, as this area is limited in the literature. Furthermore, qualitative research is to seek a depth of understanding about processes, meanings, and experiences while maintaining a level of manageability of the data (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016). Manageability was a factor that influenced the justification of my sample since my data collection methods were informed by narrative underpinnings, which accounts for potential diversity of responses by participants and the extensive nature of their responses.

The most foundational concept in qualitative sampling is through saturation, this is described by Corbin and Staruss (2007), “a researcher knows when sufficient sampling has occurred when the major categories show depth and variation in terms of their development, if a researcher determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have been made clear, then he or she can say sufficient sampling has occurred (p. 148).” Therefore, identifying relationships between concepts that are richly described as data no

longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties answers the aspect of saturation, which satisfied my sampling strategy.

Participant Recruitment. Participant recruitment was guided by a purposeful sampling approach in which I contacted community stakeholders and asked if she/he were willing to assist in locating potential research participants. Specifically, I began by searching Alberta masters swim clubs' websites and determining the coach's contacts. I connected with six Masters Swim Clubs in Alberta via email to inquire whether there were members who satisfied my inclusion criteria; aided by a recruitment poster and letter (*see Appendices C and D*). If coaches indicated she/he knew of potential participants, they passed along my information to the participants, and then the interested participants contacted me personally. I recruited 10 swimmers aged 60 - 75 from a Masters Swim Club in Edmonton and Calgary. Inclusion criteria included men and women masters athlete swimmers who were members of a masters swim club age 60 years or older. Swimmers who were not members of a swim club, and/or younger than 60 years of age were excluded.

Demographic Overview. The participant profiles that follow are provided to help contextualize participants' swimming involvement. Ten members of the Masters swimming community in the province of Alberta (8 Females, 2 Males) agreed to be interviewed. The ages ranged from 60 to 75 years (mean age of 67). Eight of the ten participants pursued post-secondary education and obtained a degree, while one obtained a graduate degree. Participants were employed in a variety of different capacities including physician, social worker, nurse, real estate agent, dentist, university professor, business owner, oil field worker, and recreation administration worker. All participants except three were retired. The detailed profiles of each participant are further explained

below; this serves to illustrate the diversity and similarities between my participants. It should be noted that the participant's identities are protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Profiles

Baileigh. A 63-year old female who began swimming with her Masters swim club 20+ years ago. She began deep water running in the same pool facility as the swim club when other swim members recruited Baileigh in the locker room. She had the ability to swim prior to joining the swim club. Baileigh has participated in swim competitions during her involvement with the club. She owns her own cleaning business and is active with her family and other sport involvement. She is living without any chronic illness.

Bennett. A 70-year old male who has been swimming with a Masters swim club for 20 years. He was an avid marathon runner and transitioned into swimming once he injured himself from running and was waiting for surgery. Bennett began swimming individually but experienced boredom when he did this; he then joined the swim club. He first began swimming when he was in university and was able to keep up his swim ability into his older adulthood. Bennett enjoys the competition of Masters swimming and continually participates in swim meets when able. Bennett is a retired social worker but is active in his community working with the homeless population and personal training. Bennett has developed chronic arthritis through his aging process and recognizes the importance of physical activity with this chronic illness.

Colleen. A 70-year old female who started swimming on her own in her thirties and then joined a swim club when her schedule allowed. She has been with a Masters swim club for 32 years. She has previously competed in triathlons and swim meets, but she

recognized this was not the reason she desired to swim. Colleen has endured some negative life experiences and made the choice not to continue her travel to the swim club, so she now mainly swims independently. Colleen is a retired registered nurse. She has developed osteoarthritis in her older adult life.

Jade. A 70-year old female who retired from social work and began swimming with a Masters swim club for 12 years. Swimming became an important part of her life after retirement, and she cannot imagine a life without it. Jade has participated in swimming competitions before, but the competition element is not an important reason for her involvement. Her swim team is focused on swim training. She is not on any medication and has no chronic illness.

Jenelle. A 62-year old female Doctor of Dentistry. She has been swimming with a Masters swim club for 20 years. She was initially recruited by a neighbour that was a member of her local swim club. After moving cities, swim club was an important part of her life and she continued her involvement with the Masters swimming community. Jenelle has competed in triathlons and a few swim meets; the enjoyment of the sport is what keeps her involved. Jenelle has not developed any chronic illness in her older adulthood.

Marilyn. A 60-year old female real estate agent who has been swimming with a Masters swim club for 32 years. She began swimming as an adult while taking lessons at her local pool and was then recruited to join the Masters swim club. Marilyn does not compete in swim meets. It is the pleasure of the swim club and the friendships that encourages her involvement. Marilyn experiences arthritis as a chronic illness.

Marlene. A 74-year old female retired professor at the University of Alberta. Swimming has always played a role in her life, and she has found a deep passion for

synchronized swimming. She has participated in many synchronization teams throughout her education career. Marlene also coaches a synchronization team and has previously judged synchro competitions. She has been involved in a synchronization Masters club for 34 years and has an extensive competition experience. She will also participate in swim training on days she is not involved with her synchro team. Marlene has developed arthritis in her older adulthood.

Mercede. A 69-year old female retired family physician. Swimming and physical activity are a tremendous part of her life. Mercede researched the Masters swim club and then joined; she has been with the club for 32 years now. She had the ability to swim prior to joining the club. Competition has played a role in her swimming career, and she was also an avid runner. Mercede has had many surgeries to fuse her spine and to create artificial knees. She has been dealing with arthritis as a chronic disease in her older adulthood.

Naomi. A 62-year old female retired from a career in recreation administration. She began swimming with a swim training Masters club 6-years ago once she entered retirement. She had an active career but did not take swimming as seriously until she retired. She had the ability to swim before she joined the swim club. Naomi would often swim over her lunch-hour when she was working. She enjoys the swim club without the pressure to compete. She receives other benefits from the swim club than the competitive environment. Naomi does not suffer from any chronic illness.

Nevin. Is a 75-year-old male who retired from a career in the oilfield. Nevin is an avid marathon runner and transitioned into a Masters swim club 10 years ago when he recognized he could not run as often as he used to. Nevin had a prior ability to swim and has always enjoyed the sport. It became a more important element in his life once his

running abilities decreased. Nevin enjoys the element of competition in swimming. A competitive nature is a prominent feature in his life, and he will participate in meets when his schedule allows. Nevin does not endure any form of chronic illness.

Data Analysis

Guiding Framework. Data are analyzed according to the thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis allows theoretical freedom and flexibility as a research tool, providing the ability to understand a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke). Therefore, a primary reason that thematic analysis fits with an interpretive description methodology is the flexibility behind the process. Thematic data analysis allows researchers the flexibility to not have to subscribe to theoretical commitments of a specific methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This compliments interpretive description of harmonizing multiple methodologies in one. Data analysis was also informed by Bazeley (2009) and Thorne (2008) who encourage researchers to move beyond mere description and sequential presentation of themes, with an enquiring mind and eye for evidence by asking questions of your data. Consistent with Bazeley, my analysis demonstrates coherence of the data, completeness, and robustness by the storied explanation derived from this research and its participants. However, the stories of my participants are focused into *themes* that allow the stories to be organized and substantiated. This process allows for the themes around my participants experiences to be developed and understood.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic approach to analysis requires specific procedures including: familiarizing oneself with the data; generating initial codes and collating data relevant to each code; searching for themes and gathering all data

relevant to each potential theme; reviewing each theme and generating a thematic map of the analysis; defining and naming collated themes; and finally, producing a report. For the purposes of my study, my results section forms the ‘report’—telling the complicated story of my data in a way that demonstrates to the reader the merit and validity of my analysis. The aforementioned procedures are described in detail below.

Contextualizing Data Through the Use of Narratives. In addition to my interpretive description methodology and thematic data analysis strategies, the data provided in this study are situated and contextualized using narrative underpinnings. Furthermore, I consider the ‘storied’ element of the data provided and how they are related to my overarching themes that are identified. The process of analysing participants’ stories provides the ability to obtain new insight into the data, which results in extending the thematic data analysis strategies. Methodologically speaking, the process of understanding results based on the ‘storied’ elements informing my analysis enables me to create a comprehensive storyline. This comprehensive storyline encourages rich description of the experiences of the Masters athlete swimmers.

Analysis Procedures. The first step in the analysis process is to familiarize myself with the data. I collected my own data through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for initial knowledge, thoughts, and interests of the data to form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was able to obtain a level of closeness to my data at a different level than if my data was obtained by someone else. I listened to participants tell their story, each providing her/his unique insight to my questions. The act of listening allowed the process of familiarity of the participants’ stories to progress in my mind. This familiarity was a process of knowing the participants and their stories with confidence. This occurred during connections I made to their responses and my questions, valuing the uniqueness of

their story and developing further curiosity into the research project. More specifically, I would replay quotes or statements from the participants in my mind without placing structured analysis onto these thoughts, which would encourage reflection on the message.

I continued to familiarize myself with my data by creating a field note document before and after each interview. Examples of two participant field notes and a final field note are included in the appendix (*Appendix E*). The field notes that I created before the interview described the thoughts I had prior to the interview, the environment in which the interview would be taking place, and any other notes about the interview process that I felt were important to document. The purpose of this action was to facilitate critical reflection before, during, and after my data collection and progressing throughout my analysis. This process helped to keep the stories of the participants in order, and they became a guide to my analysis and the reporting of my data. The field notes encouraged honesty by the participants and myself by noting details that were not captured verbatim.

These field notes indicated my feelings, thoughts, and notes about the environment, the conversation, and concepts that were noteworthy. This influenced the initial process to my analysis, as I started to note my thoughts of patterns, stories, and representation of my research questions. As I analyzed the transcript of each participant, I would look over previous field notes to compare, and at the end of each interview I created a final field note before I began transcription. This helped to reflect on the interview process and important notes of my thoughts as I progressed through my analysis.

Next, I transcribed all ten semi-structured interviews, which helped to further familiarize myself with my data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I assigned participants

pseudonyms and stripped transcripts of any personal identifying information. The analysis process included repeated reading of the data in an active way to begin searching for themes and patterns. Reading in an active way meant making marginal notes throughout the transcripts and field notes. I also noted questions I had about the data throughout these documents. I created memos, which were a further progression from my field notes, to document my thoughts, feelings, and interpretations that I felt contributed to the discourse of these participants. This encouraged active ways of searching for meanings, and patterns of the data set.

The second phase involved generating initial codes from the data. I began this process by hand. However, due to an organizational preference, I decided to utilize NVivo (Bazeley, 2013). Bazeley (2013) recommends using NVivo to help organize large data sets, and increase the capacity to retrieve, sort, and interrogate unstructured data compared to manual pencil and paper methods. I imported my transcripts into NVivo and began a second round of coding—importantly, I did not refer back to my original codes that I had originally interpreted by hand, as they were my first step to familiarize myself with the data. I felt this personal discipline was important, as I did not want to discourage/hinder additional (and potentially new) interpretations. The combination of NVivo and ‘manual’ methods of analysis provided the opportunity to interpret rich and meaningful descriptions of my data. These descriptions of codes were satisfied through an iterative process—as new themes started to form from the data, my previous coded data was compared to see if any new codes became pertinent—described as being relevant to, and a parsimonious reflection of, the data and overarching research questions.

The second phase of generating initial codes was further aided by the creation of visual displays of the data. Using NVivo, I created the first display known as a, ‘wordle,’

which is a collective image of frequent occurring words found in the data (*Appendix F*). This can be helpful when trying to understand the common terms being talked about from participants. For example, the wordle that I created included words such as swimming, aging, club, going, stereotypes, group, physically, coach, sport, feel, social and so on. The second display is known as a thematic map: a visual link of themes and codes found in the data (*Appendix H*). The purpose of these maps was to visualize the themes that I identified as capturing participants' stories. I created this map manually using paper and pencil as it is a personal preference to ground my knowledge and understanding on a project. I created multiple thematic maps for each theme as my analysis process progressed. I did this as it encouraged repetitive questioning of the data to produce accurate representations of the swimmers' stories in a methodological way. This display was an exercise to visualize whether the themes were an accurate description of the codes of data. To make connections of the themes and codes allowed questions to be asked of the data. The questions asked helped to create robust and simple interpretations of the data. Comparing the wordle and thematic maps allowed further understanding of my data and my interpretations.

My approach as described above introduced meaningful methodological congruence (Morse, 2002) of my data and my research questions. As my analysis progressed, NVivo was utilized to code and organize my data; however, I also relied upon 'by-hand' methods of analysis. I decided to complete my analysis this way, as I did not want to become too mechanical in my interpretations. In short, my approach was to create memo documents that would describe my interpretations of codes and participant quotes that I found to be meaningful to my research questions. My memo documents were derived from initial interpretations from familiarizing myself with the data, my thoughts

about the stories that were shared, the emotions of the participant and myself, and my interpretations of significant quotes from participants. These memos were an outlet to exploring the understanding of the participant's stories and directing the process of analysis.

Phase three of my thematic analysis process involved searching for themes. This process was influenced and informed by my use of NVivo coding as well as the codes and interpretations I generated by hand. As previously mentioned, this process was aided by the visual displays, the description of codes, and the synthesis between them to answer the overarching research questions of this study. The synthesis of these parts of the data was obtained by recognizing if they all supported one another. This was based on my own interpretations and questioning to understand the truth behind the narratives within the data. The coding of my data consisted of identifying as many potential themes/patterns as possible and code extracts of data inclusively, meaning that I would keep a little of the surrounding data if it was relevant. This can help to ensure that the context is not lost during the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I recognized that the stages of my analysis were complete once I began to see repetition in my coding and identification of themes. I reviewed the themes and made refinements to the themes that did not satisfy synthesis between my themes, sub-codes, and overarching research questions. I started with thirteen themes from my coded data, which I considered to be too many. I realized many of these themes could be collapsed into other more overarching themes. I listed each theme with a list of reoccurring codes from the data (*Appendix G*); this provides a different visual of how the themes were structured and invited questioning of the themes to evaluate if the data had been captured

and satisfied with that theme. This encouraged significant refinement and synthesis of my themes.

Phase four of my analysis process included defining and naming themes. This step is important to note as many of my themes were derived from N-vivo codes from participants' stories. N-vivo codes are a result of the data directly, which captures the essence and expression of the participant (Bazeley, 2007). This was a way for me to capture the essence of their stories without identifying any initial or preconceived theme. Although this strategy allowed organization of the participant's stories, it did not impose a rigid structure on the data. This phase was reached when I could organize the stories around the overarching theme, demonstrating a simplistic, robust, and thorough explanation.

Ensuring Rigor. Rigor has been traditionally referred to as the accurate and systematic application of theory and method (Dodge, Ospina, & Foldy, 2005); the appropriate means by which knowledge can be created (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Ensuring rigor is essential to research as findings which are considered valid, can be applied to "real world" problems, and have the potential to be widely accepted (Morse, 2002). Rigor also refers to the challenges faced in research and whether the questions and findings resonate with the research (Dodge, Ospina, & Foldy, 2005).

This study offers an interpretivist view of rigor, which includes *relevance* as an explicit aspect of quality (Dodge, Opsina, & Foldy, 2005). Consistent with interpretivism, research becomes relevant and rigorous when it accurately captures a sense of meaning as seen by consumers, researchers, and populations. The application of method must be self-referential; as a researcher I must assume I am asking the right questions and applying the right theory.

This study's methodology of interpretive description addresses notions of rigor by portraying the details of an experience to highlight a phenomenon of interest, which further lends to important insights to others engaged in the same area (Dodge, Ospina, & Foldy, 2005). This interpretivist view of rigor encourages illuminating the reality from the inside out. Qualitative research does not focus on the exact record that has taken place, but rather looks to understand a person or community's subjective reality.

The methodology of interpretive description asks whether the research process and its findings are fair, unbiased, and coherent by external viewers of the data (Thorne, 2008). This form of trustworthiness (or validity) is addressed by explaining how researchers have addressed issues of biases that result from self-presentation, gaining access through the research site, and methods of documentation. To remain aware and authentic in my research analysis, I have described my personal situatedness towards the research study, which acknowledges my preconceived biases.

Chapter Four: Results

To reveal the stories behind Masters athlete swimmers and their participation within a Masters swim club, I would like to begin this chapter by expanding upon the participant profiles presented in chapter three. The information that follows describes how these swimmers began their swimming journey and offers a comparison between the ten swimmers. I believe that understanding a swimmer's journey helps provide deeper interpretive insight into the study's findings. The purpose of this research is to explore Masters athlete swimmers' beliefs about aging and health through my guiding overarching research questions. *Central research question:* How do Masters athlete swimmers navigate multiple understandings of aging and physical activity? *Sub-question 1:* How do beliefs about aging influence swimming participation? *Sub-question 2:* How does swimming participation influence Masters swimmers' experiences of, and beliefs about, aging?

Participant Swimming Background

To further inform my demographic overview of study participants, this section will provide a further in-depth summary related to the experiences of the participants' swimming background. The 10 Masters swimmers all had some form of swimming ability prior to entering the Masters swim club as older adults. Jade and Naomi's swimming began more seriously in their retirement years. These ladies both had active careers where participating in a sport or exercise over their lunch-hour was part of their daily routines. Marilyn gravitated to swimming in her adult life; she decided to take swimming lessons to improve her swimming ability. Her continuous participation in swim lessons encouraged those in the swim community to promote her involvement in

the Masters swim club. This then became a long-term commitment for her life.

Many participants were previously avid runners. Bennett started to swim seriously when he was attending university and later swam within the context of triathlons. Initially he swam to improve his technique so that he would be a better swimmer in his triathlons. This began to shift once he had to transition from running to swimming as his main sport due to an injury; while waiting for surgery Bennett began to swim on his own, and then once able, he began swimming with the Masters swim club. Transitioning to swimming involved discipline and self-reliance. He started swimming in the slower percentile of swimmers. This did not make the transition from being one of the top runners for his age an easy one:

Switching to swimming that was a big shock because when I ran I wasn't, you know the fastest, but you know, I turned up in the first 10 - 20%, I always did well. Now you know, in swimming, I'm the slowest. (Bennett)

Now swimming has become such an important part of Bennett's life it would be unimaginable to live without it. This transition of running to swimming influenced Nevin's life as well. His dominant sport was running, and marathon running was a part of who he was. When Nevin decreased his running, he started to swim again. In contrast, Jenelle participated in triathlons while remaining an active participant of her swim club—both aspects of running and swimming were important to her active lifestyle.

The love of swimming for Marlene was reinforced and fostered throughout her education as she participated in synchro teams in different locations while pursuing post-secondary education. Alongside synchronized swimming, Marlene also trains with the Masters swim club. Swimming has always played an important role in her life. Colleen's start in swimming began as an adult in her 30s. This was once she allotted the time to participate after a busy and hectic post-secondary education and beginning her career as a

nurse. She had the ability to leave her kids at home with her spouse so that she could take the time to swim. Her nursing career was very demanding, and it was not until her later adult life that swimming increased in importance for her:

This winter I hired people to shovel my snow because I can move snow and I am strong enough, but this will hurt my shoulders, and I hired painters because this hurts my shoulders, so I tell people that my shoulders are for swimming. I won't do anything that will harm them. (Colleen)

The role of swimming throughout participants' lifecourse was varied—its role changed for each swimmer. However, what was consistent between all participants was the importance placed on regular participation in physical activity. A swimming-based lifestyle was an interpretation of these swimmers' stories. This lifestyle is further exemplified throughout the results of the data.

Overview of Themes

Data analysis procedures resulted in the construction of six themes. These themes capture participants' swimming experiences and perceptions of their aging and physical activity. A theme is described as “something that captures the importance of the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Each theme has been named to capture the essence of the representation of the participant's discourse as follows: *Feeling Your Best After a Swim*; *The Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs*; *The Swimmer Profiles*; *Support and Motivation*; *Swimming Keeps Me Healthy*; *Swimming Helps The Aging Process*. Although the names of each theme capture the overarching details of the story being told, sets of sub-themes are also presented to further illustrate the discourse and organize the data set.

The sub-themes within *Feeling Your Best After a Swim* include energy, enjoyment, and confidence. In *The Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs*, the sub-themes are: identifying as a socially unique group, camaraderie, coaching, and privilege. The theme, *The Swimmer Profiles*, is associated with the following sub-themes: the way you move, lifetime athlete, and competitive nature. *Support and Motivation* includes the following sub-themes: support to swim, parental influence, and life organized around swimming. The sub-themes of *Swimming Keeps Me Healthy* include: swimming reducing injury, health decline when not swimming, swimming helps arthritic pain, and frames the mind. Lastly, the theme *Swimming Helps the Aging Process* includes sub-themes of: attitude and aging, age and competition, aging and function, aging as an ally, and acceptance and awareness. These six themes and sub-themes help to make sense of the story of these Masters athlete swimmers and the influences that physical activity has upon aging; furthermore, these themes inform the overarching research questions of this study, as these findings lead to the understanding of navigations of aging and the beliefs that inform their participation.

Feeling Your Best After a Swim

Feeling your best after a swim described participants' sense of enjoyment, energy, and confidence. The stories that the participant's shared were based on the outcome after their engagement in swimming. These feelings overflowed into other areas of their lives such as the energy they felt following a workout, the sense of enjoyment from the act of swimming, and the self-confidence that arose in the face of life adversities. Energy, enjoyment, and confidence were the sub-themes that helped contextualize feeling one's best after a swim and were brought to life when describing why she/he swam.

Energy. Energy is described as increased levels of endorphins and motivation throughout the day. The energy that was from swimming was something described by many of the swimmers. “You could be dragging your butt there, but after you swim for an hour, you’re just totally energized” (Baileigh). Similarly, Jenelle spoke of endorphins:

I always feel better after I’ve been in the pool, you can definitely feel the, well, the endorphins...It’s an endorphin rush. Well I always feel invigorated when I finish, once I’m warmed up. I’m always pleased when I feel like I’ve had a good workout.

The feeling of having increased energy after a swim was a common theme among participants.

Naomi described similar reasons as to why she feels her best after a swimming workout, “I feel the best all day after I’ve had a swim, after we’ve done our hour. It helps you feel better with everything.” Feeling your best was interpreted as a benefit of swimming.

However, it was also recognized that acquiring this energy required effort, “To get energy you must expend energy,” (Bennett).

Baileigh, Jenelle, Naomi, Bennett, and Marlene were insightful and describe their feeling best as the energy they feel as a result of swimming. The energy is satisfying to feel and is experienced after each swim. Naomi drew a comparison between her active life and co-workers who did not have the same mentality:

What do people do who aren’t active? When I was working and I’d go out on my lunch hour and I’d watch my colleagues around me just go for lunch and then come back. I’d think I don’t know how they do this, just sit all day and not move, if I did that, if there was ever a day I couldn’t get out I’d have a headache by 4 o’clock. And I’d be exhausted I could barely make supper. Whereas on the days that I swam, it was no problem with energy.

For Naomi, daily tasks would be difficult if she did not receive the benefits of swimming; she would miss the energy it gave her. The other side of energy relates to participants’

perceptions of how it is experienced, as one ages noticing a difference each year in continuing with the same activity. As Marilyn described, “Yes, I’m hard on myself and it gets harder as you get older you realize you can’t, you don’t have the wind that you used to, your lungs aren’t as good as they used to be.” Jenelle puts the difference of energy from year-to-year into the perspective of, “I’m going for the same level of exertion, same level of enjoyment.”

These swimmers felt good, and they reported having increased endurance and increased levels of energy as a result of swimming regularly. For participants, the feelings of energy coincided with feelings of enjoyment. Having more energy was an important aspect of swimming. The stories shared around feeling your best after a swim were further exemplified in the level of enjoyment that also resulted when swimming.

Enjoyment. Enjoyment referred to the positive feeling swimmers get from their continued participation; a positive sensation that pooled into the other areas of their life. Enjoyment was based on the pure love to swim and the fulfilment that accompanied swimming. “Swimming is just wonderful for keeping your body moving. It’s helped me maintain feeling good about myself and I know it’s a good healthy thing to do. I just really enjoy doing it” (Mercede). Her enjoyment was based on her awareness that it is healthy to keep the body moving. The enjoyment of being in the water is how Naomi described this experience:

You know now, it’s fitness, it’s the social part, just the love of being in the water. I don’t know how it became one sport that I’ve clung to, something I took to. It is just the love of the sport. You find you gravitate to things you like when you can do them well, I guess. It always came easy to me. Not that I’m a great swimmer, but it always was something I have really enjoyed doing.

Similarly, Jade explained, “Swimming was very natural and something I’ve always enjoyed...it fits in well.” Colleen further elaborated on her enjoyment, “I really enjoy swimming. The enjoyment I just really enjoy it. If I’m around the water I want to swim in it, I just love it.” Mercede also discussed her enjoyment surrounding being active, “I’ve always enjoyed being active and I’ve always enjoyed being in the water.”

Swimming created a feeling of enjoyment that resonated with the lives of participants. The enjoyment stemmed from feelings of being in the water, participants’ ability to swim, and the subsequent fitness benefits. Enjoyment and the love to swim were two important reasons why these swimmers continued to swim. The enjoyment of swimming was also seen to have an effect on one’s overall sense of confidence.

Confidence. The sub-theme confidence was constructed through stories from several participants who related their experiences with adversities and how being involved in swimming encouraged a higher sense of confidence among them. The feeling of assurance to persevere through challenges was how these swimmers maintained their level of confidence, which added to the overall story of feeling your best after a swim.

Bennett discussed confidence in terms of his mindset entering the pool:

[My approach is...] to not leave anything in the pool. When I had cancer, you know I would, I let some of the people here know, and I was swimming and I had the support and they gave you the confidence that I said okay, well, how I approach cancer is, it’s another adventure. Whereas if I was, by myself you know, I may not, and not in a club like that, I suspect I would withdraw more, pull back more.

This part of Bennett’s story described the effort and energy he valued with swimming. Bennett associated the energy he received from swimming with his overall confidence and self-reliance. This level of confidence was further increased from the supportive atmosphere of the swim club.

Bennett's confidence was something he experienced in a time of difficulty; his confidence was illuminated in the swimming pool. Nevin shared his experience of how swimming increased his confidence outside of the pool:

I guess it gives you a little more confidence, yeah in every area. You kind of, you're not going to be pushed around, if someone tries to talk down to you, there's a certain point where you would stick up for yourself. Yeah I think you just, put things into better perspective. That's the key right there.

Confidence can solidify positive feelings of self, which pool into other areas of life. A better outlook on adversities and situations has been influenced by the trait of confidence according to these swimmers. For example, Mercede spoke about positive feelings of self, "It's helped me maintain feeling good about myself." Similarly, Marlene explained, "Yes I feel satisfied I suppose, self-satisfied with physical courage." Nevin shared his experience with confidence by having a better outlook on adversities:

I think you handle problems better, take better view of life in general and you can put up with certain things that are, you know what I mean. You become a little more relaxed and in control, you believe you can handle things.

Having control and the confidence to face life's challenges was brought to light in terms of how these swimmers felt their best with swimming.

Summary. The stories of these swimmers around the theme of *Feeling Your Best After a Swim*, shed light onto what sorts of satisfaction and rewards result from swimming. Experiencing enjoyment, energy, and confidence played an important role in discovering the sense of feeling your best after a swim. These feelings of enjoyment of the sport, increased energy from the sport, and increased confidence from the sport were stories that reflected the experiences of these swimmers. The stories of the swimmers

described experiences that we cannot see or measure, but rather a learned and discovered interpretation of what swimming has influenced in their lives.

The Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs

The ethos of the club refers to the character or disposition that informs the beliefs or practices of the group/club. The sub-themes that help elaborate upon this theme are: identifying as a socially unique group, camaraderie, coaching, and privilege. The ethos of Masters swim clubs is explained through the swimmers' beliefs and experiences of coaching style, camaraderie and friendships, commitment and involvement, and the social determinants of health. This theme helps clarify why participants value swimming, and, more particularly, their attachment to a club. This theme was identified through a participant's quote that I felt invoked such great meaning to how club's participation is informed by beliefs and practices of the participants: "I think that one of the other Masters clubs in town is nowhere as supportive as we are, we value this aspect and it is all about how you establish the ethos of a club environment" (Mercede).

Identifying as a Socially Unique Group. Two particular quotations provide a rich and enlightened description of what it means to identify as a socially unique group: "The socialization keeps me with the group; the love of the sport keeps me in the water" (Naomi). Naomi describes the beliefs that inform her participation in the club, or rather, the ethos of the club environment. It is a raw explanation of the importance of participating in the club being linked to the social uniqueness of the club. It describes why the group setting was a particular draw for these athletes.

The second quotation illustrates the simplicity of the love, desire, and enjoyment of the sport as informing the practices of the club: "We are a social club with a swimming

problem” (Mercede). This phrase openly describes the ethos of the club, the beliefs that inform participation around the love for swimming, and the social benefits. The prominence of a social community was evident from all participants and the expression of the ethos in a club. The socialization encourages the social life these swimmers share together. “For the fun, the social, and the people. It’s our social circle, our social life, we have a very social club” (Baileigh). The swimmers become a part of their social networks and they spent the majority of their social time with each other:

The social aspect of the club makes you go, if you don’t go somebody is going to notice it. We do lots of social stuff together. So I think that the social network behind master swim clubs is quite significant. (Jenelle)

The social practices inform the ethos of the club, the similarity between the stories of the swimmers, and their desire to be physically active. The swimmers share their love to be active and then to socialize, which influences their ethos of participating in a Masters club. “There are a group of us that have coffee every day after swimming. People socialize outside of the swimming as well. I would say the social part keeps me in the club” (Naomi).

It is evident that the social aspect of a group of active swimmers is a valuable attribute to what informs the beliefs and practices among them. “I swim for the fitness, for the mental health, and for the social content” (Marlene). Furthermore, the ethos has influenced the swim club’s friendships that have become an important part of these participants’ lives. The social uniqueness of the Masters swim club influences friendship groups and social outings:

We have a very social club, like lots of pub nights and breakfasts, the ladies once a month get together for soup, It’s a fabulous group of ladies I know, I bet you we are probably 70% women now for swimmers. And we do a hiking weekend every summer and we do a cross-country ski weekend with the ladies in the winter. And the gals that I curl with

tonight, two of them I swim with, and we you know, in the winter it turns out we see each other like, we swim Tuesday, curl Wednesday, swim Thursday, and we kind of get Friday off usually, and we swim Saturday and then we curl on Sunday as well. It's a lot of 'see ya tomorrow.' (Baileigh)

Mercede explains the social uniqueness of the club during a workout:

Yeah, you know they write down the workout on the board and you've got that to get through, and people that are in my lane that are the same speed or faster or slower because we kind of set our own lane of where we're going to, so we don't clog up the 30 year old who is whipping by us, so it kind of helps you keep up to someone who is a little faster, because I don't swim as fast when I'm alone as I do when I'm with a group, so it's a socially unique thing, it keeps you honest.

For Marilyn, the social ethos of the club includes having a sense of comfort among the members:

So you get to know everyone very intimately because you know, who else do you see, three times a week, [the women] completely naked in the locker room and chat with? You learn about the group of individuals because of the amount of time you spend together for months out of the year. The hardest things for me to leave will be the swim club. It's been my family actually, away from home of, as a lot of people who've gone through divorce and all that. So they are my support group, it's a very social group as well as a swimming group. It was a huge part of my life, I would say that it was probably of the activities I did in my social time, I would say it was 75% associated with the swim club. My exercise it was again probably 50-75% of what I did for exercise as well. So it was a huge part of my life, and it will be a huge part of my life that I will miss, and I will try to join a club where I'm moving, or maybe even start one if there isn't one.

Marilyn relays her story of how the club members became her social support system as she went through a divorce. She reflects on how the social ethos had impacted her personal life—contributing to her participation in the club. The development of the relationships grows when you are together for years; this is an important aspect of these swimmers' stories. These are long-term swimmers, as the shortest membership amongst participants is six years. Many of the participants from the same swim club mentioned the

popularity of joining their club and indicated the club was thriving and that there is an extensive waitlist to join. The high-demand of the club relates back to the ethos and the aspects that inform the beliefs and practices to keep the swimmers engaged in the club. Identifying as a socially unique group informs a social ethos, as the practice to have a social connection among members was a valued belief among the swimmers.

Camaraderie. Camaraderie is built on the value of social uniqueness and influences from other swim members and how this encourages identifying as a socially unique group. The ethos to be a social group that values the aspect of camaraderie informs the beliefs and practices of participating in a Masters swim club. The sub-theme camaraderie describes the friendship among people who spend a lot of time together. Bennett describes how the sense of camaraderie, friendship, and commonality created the ethos of the Masters swim clubs. For example, there were certain routines that influenced their social community: “After our practice from 6 - 7, we’ll sit around, go for coffee, and there might be 8, 9, 10 ... might be 2 or 3, of us and we sit around till we all pair off to go to work and that.” According to him, it became a part of the daily routine to have the connection of social relationships among the swimmers:

I suspect that most people that are in a Masters club have some sort of a love of athleticism that’s probably a little bit higher than the general population. Athleticism creates camaraderie, you push each other, you learn from each other, and participate with each other. So you can do more when you’re in a team than when you’re by yourself, the sense of camaraderie, friendship, and commonality in a social setting. (Bennett)

Similarly, Nevin explains:

I like the social camaraderie, you can develop some real strong friendships from being social in the club. That’s kind of how it all started and I like it, I like the camaraderie, it’s nice because a guy like me, technique is always a challenge, especially swimming, and they are very good about that. If you have a concern, if you feel you’re not getting your hand in right or whatever, they are only too happy to help.

Clearly, these Masters athlete swimmers are not approaching the club as solely an opportunity for exercise. The environment of the club and particularly the social benefits and camaraderie are important factors for participants. The camaraderie and the social uniqueness that inform Masters swim clubs are considered to influence the habit and routine of participation. For example, according to Marilyn:

It becomes habit, that's all you do, it's a habit and you know that, not that I don't miss, I miss if I have to work but it's a set time. So you do it Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturdays and if you can avoid it being at the same time of something else, you do. It's a part of your schedule. I think that's part of the key is to make it part of your schedule and the other key is social, if there is no aspect of social in it or even motivation to go because people aren't going, I wouldn't do it. I think that's the key to getting people to do things is. That's why it's hard to do things at the gym because it's much more sedentary, not sedentary, much more of an alone thing. Whereas you get the camaraderie of the pool, so that helps.

Camaraderie creates the ethos of Masters swim clubs and creates the drive for these swimmers to be engaged in the activity. The sub-code of camaraderie is based on a sense of mutual trust and friendship among those who spend a significant amount of time together. Camaraderie is built upon a social uniqueness that informs the ethos of the Masters swim club environment.

Coaching. Participants of Masters swim clubs tend to gravitate to a coached style to sport. Coaching contributes to the ethos of Masters swim clubs by encouraging the practice and culture of the club. A coach can play a pivotal role in attracting members to the club or deter them from joining. Coached sport involves overview of individual technique and the support to improve its members. Participants describe how they enjoyed the communal approach directed by a coach's pre-planned workout. The pre-planned workout and the organization of the swim club was attractive to Jenelle: "I'm

definitely someone who does better with something that's organized." The influence of consistency and routine was a part of the club's ethos that was important to Jade:

I think the routine the gets me out, plus the coaching is very good, you know at 9:30 you know what you're doing, whereas If I was lazy and came here at 3:30 pm and rush it to do something else, it wouldn't be the same commitment or focus if I didn't have allotted time.

The coach creates the environment, the potential effort that can be put in, the motivation to improve, and the technique to encourage your best performance. The ethos is encouraged through these practices by the coached environment. In some ways, individuals gravitate to coached sport for these reasons, as it can influence produce higher exertion levels compared to training individually: "[Coaches] push you more," Baileigh explains. The ethos of coaching is about creating a space that encourages participation. One way a coach can determine this is through creating workouts for the team. By doing this, it informs the effort of the swimmer and the beliefs of why to participate within the club:

I'm training, so you know, and so here we'll, you know, we'll do intervals or something and you, you know, the people in my lane, we don't chat in the pool and talk, we do intervals and we do that and so the rewards are that if and it reinforces what you know, the training aspect of it so that you are pushing yourself more. You know you do interval training and you are staying at a routine of 10-second rest, whereas if you are by yourself it is harder to do that, right, or if you are by yourself. (Bennett)

The ethos of coaching can influence the level of engagement in the activity. Coaching is also perceived to foster a supportive swimming environment. For example, according to Mercede:

We have a wonderful, very strong coach, who is very supportive and really encouraging and she's been able to suggest that people move [lanes] around more. [Our coach is] a good leader, she's a good coach, not just putting up swim workouts that are appropriate, but also, sort of in managing people. Oh yeah, I've been there over 30 years, so we've had coaches come and go and the one, they've always been encouraging, the older ones tend to be more encouraging, the younger, we've had a couple

of young men and over the 30 year period, and they are perfectly good at putting up appropriate workouts that vary the strokes and vary the times and go from cardio to distance swimming and stuff like that. They've never been as good at managing the people, and we have a coach right now who's very good at that, which is nice.

As Mercede describes in her story, coaching is more than putting up a swim workout. It is managing people, and showing leadership skills to create the environment. If the encompassed ethos environment of coaching is not present, its members will notice it. Mercede mentions this difference in her years with the club and various coaches. The ethos of the club is altered depending on how the coach perceives the environment. Mercede explains that it is not only about putting up a swim workout and facilitating it, but also that there is more to the environment that should be valued. The "coaching" sub-code describes the sense of idealism to have a coach to push the limits of exercise. The environment that is created, which in turn informs the beliefs that bring the swimmers to the Masters swim club, determines the aspect of coaching in a club's ethos.

Privilege. The ethos of Masters swim clubs encompasses various motivational aspects with respect to participation. The beliefs and practices of what creates this environment are understood to be the ethos. The social benefits and leadership styles have been explained by the participants to be an influence to the ethos. The other element of ethos of a Masters club is the sense of privilege associated with participation. Privilege is described by some of the swimmers as feelings of commonality as a group to having higher socioeconomic status and class, level of income, and level of education compared to the general population. Comments related to privilege are elicited from participants' stories when asked if ageist attitudes could be eliminated with the increase of Masters athletics, and how we might promote more individuals to participate in Masters sport. Participants' responses, on the one hand, reveal a realization that they are

members of an advantaged group. On the other hand, the majority of participants also view Masters swim clubs as affordable for all.

For Bennett, there is an obvious commonality between members:

The commonality of people in the club that I think, are better educated, professional in their careers, that probably and probably better paid. Whereas, I think the general, more than the general population might be, there's that connection with people that are highly successful and are likely to spin off into other areas as well, whereas if you're, so that might be something to do with it.

As an aside, Bennett is aware of a subsidy that their swim club would provide to those whose financial circumstance is disadvantaged. However, the specifics do not appear to be public knowledge. Bennett explains how level of education and income are a privilege and could be barriers to others joining a Masters swim club:

Not for me because I work a second job, actually I work two other jobs, I run a program for the provincial government for impaired drivers and I do that once a month and I work a second job, but I pay \$700 for my swim club, I pay \$600 for my gym membership here and then every day that I come here I drive back and forth and you know, so today I drove here five o'clock in the morning, then back home, then back here again, then I'm going to work. So I go from here straight to work, so transportation, so it's, let's say its 30 - 40 km that adds up, so there's some money as well. And if you are on a fixed income, it could be very limiting as well. Or my wife's fusion class the next class starts in December and \$200 bucks, that's a lot of money for a two and half month program. So the benefits of this place is that if you take courses here you don't have to pay extra. At the Y, you maybe have a membership if you're going to take a course like that, you have to pay extra for those courses.

The story behind Bennett's experience with the underlying elitist perceptions of Masters swim clubs addresses his elitist view that maybe is not widely recognized. Bennett reflects on members' education and ability to pay an annual fee to attain their membership. Similarly, Jade relates the type of professions involved in the club with their education and income class:

From my younger years, I had discipline as a person, professional life and

family life, I hate to think it's [members] a higher end of socioeconomic status but maybe it might be more professionals, you know retired professionals, or business people, upper-middle class.

Mercedee tells a similar story:

[Finances] could be [limiting]. I mean, I don't know what it's like. I kind of do, having come from a family doctor background, that the people in my club, almost all are university graduates, they are defined people who keep active the way we have, are so often higher in the education bracket. We have a whole range of people, couple other doctors, nurses, accountants, lawyers, and teachers in my club, and so the kind of people who pay attention like keeping yourself active and healthy as you get older, tend to be, as you are undoubtedly aware, better educated than people who are barely, they have high school or maybe they don't even have high school. They are relatively well educated and that's kind of the type of person who tends to pay attention to their health a lot.

The ethos of privilege influence Bennett and Mercedee to speak to the fact that Masters swim clubs may attract a certain type of individual. Though the ethos informs the beliefs and practices within a unified group, there can be differing perspectives among the membership. For instance, some swimmers do not perceive the club to provide financial limitations. Jenelle's story describes the ethos of privilege and financial status through a different lens than Bennett:

I think ours is quite affordable, we definitely have a huge range, one of the women who swims in my lane is a piano teacher and a babysitter, so she's not going to be making very much money, but we have physicians and engineers, and CEOs who swim as well. The annual dues are I think quite reasonable. They are 300 - 400 dollars, obviously it depends, you make choices in your life what you spend your money on, but it's not, that's not a barrier.

Similarly, Marilyn describes the perceived low financial costs associated with her club:

And it's so cheap, for us, we pay, I think when I first joined it was like \$145 a year, I think we are up to \$460 a year, but it's still like two dollars a swim, where can you do that? When you put the perspective of two dollars per swim it does seem relatively reasonable, however, this can again be a judgment because some may not be able to pay for the two dollars swim on a regular basis. So it's very, it's an equalizing platform. I mean there's everything from doctors to receptionists to whatever, the

whole gamut of people, but there you're just swim club members. So it doesn't matter, it's a very inviting, it's a very supportive group and the kind of group if you click with them, you don't quit.

There are two views describing the ethos of privilege and how different swimmers perceived it. These views inform the beliefs and practices that are brought to their own club environment. Recognizing that there were contrasting experiences to this ethos, privilege can be viewed as an influence to Masters swim club membership; meaning that relatively high levels of education, socioeconomic status and income contribute to a sense of privilege among members of a club.

Summary. The theme, Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs, is a unifying experience among swimmers. The Masters swim club environment has introduced a social uniqueness among its members, which is an important contributor to participation among the participants. The discourse of this theme is around the camaraderie experienced among the members, which influences their social ethos, a belief informing their participation. Furthermore, participating in a sport that had a coach influence was another part of the environment that the members enjoy. The ethos of Masters swim clubs is influenced by the beliefs and practices of the environment and involvement from its members, which were discovered through this theme.

This theme also introduces a judgmental discourse among the participants, which positioned physical inactivity as an unimaginable choice. The beliefs of participants who engaged in this discourse appears to be that 'choosing' not to be physically active reflects poor individual values. For these swimmers, participation in physical activity throughout their life has been a constant. Naomi's discourse explained her struggles to come to terms with how some individuals lead sedentary lives. The significance of her judgment arises from her observations of others, such as co-workers and their difference in lifestyles. Her

observations lead to a judgement without understanding others' circumstances as it relates to their activity levels. She assumes that because her co-workers do not occupy their lunch hours by being physically active, that they are not active at all.

The narrative of judgment is mainly captured by observations made to others and how that lifestyle is different than their own. The judgmental discourse is constructed through the assumptions made about people who appear not to lead physically active lives. Such a discourse is common among these Masters swimmers—perhaps due to the privilege of their socioeconomic status, level of education, and class. This can be explained as these swimmers placing such a high priority on swimming participation and physical activity engagement that it can be hard to recognize the disadvantages others may face to facilitate these same priorities. This recognition is even further difficult to understand for Mercedes, a family physician, who desperately wants to encourage her patients to reduce their blood pressure by being physically active. However, Mercedes did not address that one's socioeconomic status, income, or environmental factors, such as neighbourhood safety, transportation, housing, or access to facilities, may not favour physically active behaviours. It can be difficult to understand the limitations that some individuals may face when it comes to being physically active, which is the basis for where this narrative around discourse evolved from the stories of these swimmers. This discourse further contributes to the beliefs associated with this population and what has informed their participation.

The Swimmer Profiles

The swimming profile refers to participants' adoption of a swimmer identity through body movement, athleticism, and competition. There are multiple profiles these

swimmers adhered to including competitive and non-competitive approaches to swimming. These profiles were captured through the following sub-themes: *the way you move*, *active for a lifetime*, and *competitive nature*. This theme provided insight into the views these swimmers had of themselves being involved in a Masters swim club and how it informed other parts of their lives.

The Way You Move. The sub-theme, “the way you move” refers to the range of motion and the movement that one has as an older adult. The alternative is based on stereotypes of older adults including frailty, being slow, and compromised posture. For Colleen, her movement was brought into focus when looking to pay for a membership and being subsequently quoted an ‘adult’ instead of a ‘seniors’ rate:

When I went to get my [pass], she quoted me adult price which is nine dollars more than the senior price and I said no I’m a senior, and she kept quoting that and quoting that and I thought, well this is silly. So I took out my driver’s license, so now I just do that and I thought about you know what, I thought about it, I have a wrinkly face, I have grey hair, but it’s the way that I move.

Colleen’s swimmer profile gives the impression that she is younger than she is despite having facial features more consistent with someone her age:

[The way I move] gives people the impression that I’m younger than I am. It’s the way that I move. I think I look my age. It’s the way that I move, and I found that in yoga class, and I told my story and that’s flattering and then I was like well no this person thinks I’m lying so that’s not flattering but I said secondly, I couldn’t figure it out but it’s the way I move. I stand up straight and I walk at a brisk pace, I hop out of the water, and it’s the way that I move. Anyway, my sister was teasing me yeah you got checked out. Oh and this one time, this sounds very conceited but there were a couple of men sitting over there and I needed that chair because I come and save all the chairs here for my yoga buddies and so they started to flirt with me, and these guys were like 50 something and then go, ‘well why don’t you sit here’ and I said, ‘you two guys are too full of it’ and I just laughed, it was funny. But I think it’s the way that I move and I smile, so that always makes you look younger.

Colleen’s stories are a portrayal of the perceived benefits and rewards associated with

participating in a regular sport, such as swimming; viewed as encouraging healthier body stature and movement, “I guess the benefit of swimming is that I move a lot younger than the average.”

The way you move is an interpretation of how swimming has contributed to possessing a youthful gait as an older adult. Colleen’s story introduces how being involved in physical activity can positively influence your profile and movement. Her story challenges the perceptions to how an older adult is expected to move. This description is how Colleen reflected on her own profile as a swimmer. The swimmer profiles reflect on the experiences these swimmers have had with continued engagement in swimming and how that has played a role in their swimming identity.

Active for a Lifetime. Continued engagement in swimming is evident through participants’ stories that described how competition and being physically active encouraged a certain approach to activities in older adulthood. This sub-theme introduces the value in adopting lifelong physical activity. In short, remaining physically active is considered non-negotiable. For example, according to Colleen, “I’m not happy unless I can swim.” Swimming is a part of participants’ schedule, routine, and life:

I would miss it if I had to, if a doctor told me tomorrow you have to quit swimming because maybe you can’t take the elements in the water, well I’d be pretty upset. It would be hard to give up. (Nevin)

Swimming plays a major role in participants’ lives, contributing to an athletic ideal.

Although swimming is considered an important part of participants’ lives, motivation for one’s involvement does differ. Reflecting upon his lifetime desire to be competitive, Bennett simply states, “I’ve always been competitive.” The motivation differs for Mercede:

The act of improving oneself each season led to a mindset of what it meant

to be an athlete, I always try to keep up, and the older I get the less I can keep up but, just trying to, you really push yourself when you're with a club like that. And the clubs been going on for so long and so many of the members have been there so long and you just, we get a long so well, and we just push each other but in a very nice way. It's just a lovely atmosphere, the club that we happen to have.

The swimmer profiles are usually associated with the desire to continue an athletic and active way of life over time. Naomi describes the aspect of being active for a lifetime differently:

I'm active but I'm not considered myself as someone who's an athlete. And he [colleague] said so tell more of what you mean by that. I said, well I've always been active in various activities but athletic to me means some skill, some pro-ness with some real, not that I'm not a skilled swimmer, I'm in the second last lane in this pool and I'm the slowest in that lane. So not high speed, certainly room for improvement in my technique, can barely do butterfly mainly because I haven't been taught it and mainly because of my shoulder. So elite to me or words like that and athleticism, I see people who can really do stuff well, active to me is probably more important a term for the general population to adopt, think of yourself as an active person not an athletic person.

Naomi appears to identify as an active person rather than an athlete. In fact, Naomi corrects people who consider her to be "athletic." This approach allows her to participate in sport without possessing the elite skill typically associated with athletes. Naomi explains:

I remember one of the gals I worked with and she took up running and she'd always heard, Naomi is a runner, that's what she does with her lunch-hour, so she thought I was some great runner who was really fast and could do lots of competitions, it's just her vision of what a runner was. So if I go out that often, I must be good, and then she was way younger she was a good 15 - 20 years younger and it wasn't until she was beyond me in the trails that she thought wait a minute, she's not that good. So that was a wake-up call that no I'm active and healthy, but it doesn't mean I'm athletic or really good at it, I was never a good runner. I enjoyed running.

Naomi's vision and perceptions of what defines an athlete are not based on skill nor a competitive nature. Her story exemplifies the enjoyment of a sport being derived from the benefits and rewards an individual receives from participating, rather than from engaging

in a sport professionally or at an elite level. For Naomi, one's level of athleticism does not need to be the same as the ex-Olympian swimming in the club.

The active for a lifetime sub-theme captures the stories about what continued physical activity engagement had meant for these swimmers' lives. The stories help form an understanding of what swimming means to the lives of participants. Swimming brings with it a sense of identity as either a competitive athlete or an active person; the desire to swim being the constant. Swimmers' stories of being involved in physical activity for a lifetime, gives insight into their reflection of sport, competition, and participation as a profile to swimming.

Competitive Nature. A proportion of participants' stories describe competition as being an inner value they possess. Being "competitive," refers to the desire to improve through comparison with other club members:

We push each other. We challenge each other. You push it in your lane, and as another member says, you never push yourself as much if you are just out by yourself in a pool, as you do when you are in a pool with your friends. You kind of try to do as well as you can. (Nevin)

Similarly, Mercede indicates:

Oh yeah, I always try to keep up. And the older I get the less I can keep up but, just trying to, you really push yourself when you're with a club like that. And the club's been going on for so long and so many of the members have been there so long and you just, we get along so well, and we just push each other but in a very nice way.

As Nevin and Mercede describe, the sense of a competitive environment within the club is perceived to help one achieve more than if one was completing the same workout individually. According to Bennett, "Even though you are not necessarily competing against each other in a workout you're still pushing each other though, right? You get more dollar, more bang for your dollar." Jenelle confirms that this environment is not

viewed as negative but is instead thought to provide encouragement to push one another to improve, “I think we certainly encourage each other within the lane, yeah some members are more wanting to, ‘let’s go for it’ kind of thing but not certainly not in a negative way at all.” In fact, Mercede describes her club as one that encourages members to compete:

I don’t swim as fast but despite that within my club they’re very encouraging of swimming in meets and stuff, very encouraging, it doesn’t matter how fast you go, I was the only one in my age group when I swam competitively again in about a decade.

In contrast, Marlene views competition as potentially either motivational or a deterrent for individuals:

I guess it is motivational and in many aspects, physically and so forth, I don’t get particular over-stressed about it [competition], some people really do and they don’t like competition, I don’t mind. I don’t know if whether the competition, or the motivation just strive to improve.

Bennett’s story displays the competitive nature in his swimmer’s profile:

The experience you know, training, interval training when you’re tired, and you push yourself. You’re in a race and you’re exhausted and you’ve got another 50 metres, and you go, oh god how am I going to do it? You do it.

His explanation sheds light on Marlene’s competitive nature and the notion of, “going for it” in a race. Marlene’s competitive nature is introduced following her first solo competition:

We won these most beautiful medals, they were like a globe with cut out people around, like you know how when you make for kids you make a string, well that kind of thing around it, it was silver, it was beautiful. I competed in solo and did not do well, I had never done solo before. I competed behind a girl who was a national champion, she was amazing. That didn’t matter, I wouldn’t have won anyway. Anyway, that’s how it started and then I was hooked.

The feeling of being “hooked” on a competitive environment is something that

influences Marlene's swimmer profile. In contrast to the ideals of competition or the team encouraging each other, Marilyn associated competition with herself, "No I would say I'm non-competitive, I'm competitive with myself but not, and I'm not a former competitive swimmer." Similarly, according to Colleen, "I don't have a competitive nature."

Naomi agrees:

I don't even think they are competitive amongst each other. Competition is not really a motivator for anybody, certainly not for me. That's the only competition I ever did [run road race] and then there's, I remember when I was in my thirty's and I used to look at these people in their older golden years and I'd go, I hope I'm still doing this at that age, but now I'm at that age and I don't want to be competing, that's the last thing I want to do. It's not why I do this. It's good to compete too if that's what you want to do. There is room for all.

Summary. The swimmer profiles either fostered a competitive nature among participants or had no impact on one's competitiveness. Therefore, participants were contributing to their own personal swimmer profile whether they have a competitive nature or not. The swimmer profiles theme describes a discourse of how swimming influences a sense of identity. Swimming is thought to contribute to agility, gait, and youthful appearance. Furthermore, the swimmer profiles are built around the stories of competition regardless of whether it is valued or not. The commitment to swimming participation throughout the lifecourse, influences their swimmers profile.

The narrative construction about being a Masters athlete swimmers can often dominate the idealist perspective that one must be an elite athlete with qualifying skill to participate. However, that is often not the case for many of these Masters athlete swimmers. Their participation revolves around the reality of being active rather than a focus on the competitive edge and having the elite skill to become a member of the

Masters swim club. The construction of this narrative derives from these swimmers simply being involved in a Masters swim club for other benefits they receive such as social relationships and physical fitness. Furthermore, many of these swimmers do not formally compete in any swim competitions. It is rather a construction of being physically viable as they age. The narrative construction of being active versus an athlete encourages a more approachable way of facilitating physical activity than viewing it as a daunting experience to be skilled. This narrative was a common discourse among the swimmers, as many of them do not participate in competitive environments, such as Masters swim competitions, any more. There have been the swimmers who have participated in these types of environment, but it does not encourage their participation. A swimmer having support and motivation encourage participation in physical activity in older adults.

Support and Motivation

The theme of support and motivation includes internal and external factors participants indicate are important contributors to their continued swimming in their respective clubs. The sub-themes within this theme are *support to swim*, *parental influence*, and *life organized around swimming*. This theme provides stories that help explain how participation in the club is supported and promoted by their friends, family, or themselves.

Support to Swim. This sub-code refers to the support and encouragement participants receive to participate in the Masters swim club. The swimmers describe their support from their spouses, children, and friends. The stories around being ‘cheered on’ were consistent expressions of the support provided to encourage continued engagement in swimming.

Bennett received support from his wife and children, who viewed his participation as ‘pretty cool.’ His wife, despite different interests, fully encourages his participation:

About support from my wife, I would say ‘everyone is faster’ and she would say ‘just relax, just enjoy it, do what you can.’ And you know, I find I’m so competitive and so that helped me to take things more relaxed and enjoy it and not feel comparing yourself or competing against other people and that.

Being supported to swim and maintain an active life is consistent throughout even Bennett’s leisure moments, such as taking a vacation. This meant that when planning a vacation, his wife recognized it was important to find a place where he could get a workout in, “She knows I won’t go unless there is a gym I can work out in” (Bennett). The importance of being regularly physically active, even during a vacation, and having understanding, accommodating partners is true for Baileigh as well, who has a supportive husband. Both of them travel for swim competitions:

Yeah, so just the travel and didn’t have to work we, I think 3 years ago they [National Meet] were in Ontario and then that summer they had a World Meet in Montreal that we were going to, so we didn’t make the trip to Ontario in May. We were going in August and then the very next year they had them in central Canada again.

Similarly, Nevin spoke to the support his spouse gives him, and her desire to watch his meets:

My wife at swim meets, she’s quite often come out to watch it. But yeah she’s been supportive which helps. I don’t ask her to come out, because, I mean if you’re watching the Olympics of course that’s exciting, great commentary, great swimmers, but watching a Masters swim meet is not everybody’s cup of tea to watch.

Nevin’s wife’s support stems from her own willingness to be there for her husband. Whereas, Jade’s experience of support differs from Baileigh, Nevin, and Bennett as it stems primarily from within. However, those close to her encouraged Jade’s continued involvement:

You know I live on my own, so it's not like I have anyone kicking me out the door, but they're interested of all things that I might do, I've got a couple of brothers and nieces and nephews, which I'll see, I'm seeing one later on this afternoon, yeah so they kind of know and they think it's cool that Auntie does that.

Marlene described those that support her being pleased with her participation, "Well they all, I'm pleased that I do swim, they don't understand about getting so cold, which I don't like either. They do support it, not financially in any way, just oh definitely." The stories of support were further expanded when the swimmers with children started to talk about how their support was received. The experience of Marilyn's support evolved when she started her family:

Well I guess, my kids and family all through the years, I swam before I had kids so it was a given that I was able to go swimming when my kids were little because my partner at that time, my husband at that time looked after the kids.

Colleen spoke to similar situations of her spouse looking after the children while she swam:

I used to get up at a god-awful hour in the morning, 5:30 in the morning and go swimming because my kids were at home, so there had to be someone at home to look after them. So I did that too.

Based on Mercede's experience, being a mom who swam became a routine part of life:

I've always loved being in the water and I have a very supportive family, because I was working, as a family doctor, I was working 60 hours a week. Very supportive husband and my kids it's just routine for them. Mom is busy all the time and I loved swimming, it's part of my exercise routine and part of my social life for over 30 years now.

The swimmers' experience of support relates to how important their participation in the swim club is to them, which is influenced by their family and friends.

Naomi influenced the sense of support within her family, as physical activity became a family affair. They all support and cheer each other on in their active lifestyles:

You know, I think, we pushed the girls to ‘pick a sport’ you need to be active. Figure it out, figure out what it is you like, and they were in a whole realm of things when they were little to try and figure out what they did like. Our kids grew up at road races because we dragged them all over the province and all over the city doing road races, my husband was an avid runner and triathlete. We always had them out to support every weekend.

Naomi’s children’s support is engrained within the family’s normal routine. The support is derived from a sense of encouragement from close family or friends. The support to swim is based on the experiences of having people value, admire, and motivate you to continue with sport involvement. The discourse around support is also evident through stories about participant’s parents and how these influences can contribute to a lifestyle of physical activity.

Parental Influence. The sub-theme “parental influence” refers to having a set of parents who encouraged physical activity and/or a recognition that one’s parents contribute to participants’ current values of being physically active. Naomi beautifully stated the importance of having a supportive set of parents; viewing it as setting the stage for an active lifestyle through their encouragement:

One other thing I think I should mention is the influence of parents throughout all this. My parents were very active and made sure all their kids were active, none of us were into anything competitive except, well the boys played hockey, one sister tried competitive swimming for a year but didn’t really take to it, didn’t really like it. It wasn’t done in a competitive way, but they always just did things with us on weekends that always involved us walking or hiking, I mean not that they had a lot of money with eight kids, so it was just a mindset that makes a difference in your life. My mindset was always around staying active for the fun of it. My dad was active in Judo for years, he was a black belt and he coached and judged and taught and so on. And when he got to the point in his life where he no longer had the physical capacity, he found it really hard to stay active without something he loved because he played football and basketball throughout college as an activity he loved, and then went to having to figure out as he aged what was going to work for him. He has figured it out, but to him working out now is work, whereas before it was play. And he was always top of my mind to why you want to stay active

and healthy so that you age well. He's 88 and he still goes over to this local pool/gym and rides the bike and does the cross-trainer and lifts weights. He was into his eighties before he sold his bike and he was biking around river trails. And mom was always active, always swam, badminton, walking, they were bird watchers, they were snowshoers, you name it. There wasn't one kid of my siblings that isn't active.

For Naomi, participating in physical activity was the norm in her family, despite any financial limitations. This encouraged playfulness and imagination to be active. Physical activity and active play were things she grew up with; it was a mindset, and it was never questioned. Perhaps not surprisingly, Naomi and her husband stressed the importance of a physically active lifestyle among their children:

You know, I think, we pushed the girls to 'pick a sport' you need to be active. Figure it out, figure out what it is you like, and they were in a whole realm of things when they were little to try and figure out what they did like. We always read that get your kid involved in sport because that helps so much with body image, and self-esteem, and health. So that was kind of non-negotiable, find some activity you like. Whether it was competitive or not, wasn't as important to us. Your attitude about your lifelong aging and activity comes, it's set way back from the time, your influences in your family, the influences in the club that you are part of as a kid or not.

Bennett's story about parental influence is displayed through developing a sense of curiosity and confidence to trying new things:

I don't know, I think it's my individual personality and it's also the sports and being in adventure stuff all my life and maybe I thank my parents for giving me that, the option of, the confidence to try different things and the stupidity to try different things.

The level of confidence and curiosity was exuded from his parents and their influence on being physically active and allowing that to be emulated in any of his desires.

This discourse on feelings of confidence and curiosity further developed within Colleen and the way she spoke about her father's physical activity:

...my father was a very strong swimmer so he didn't know how to teach us how to swim but both my sister and I were thrown in the water, and

they would just tie a rope around us and go keep going, keep going, so that we wouldn't be afraid and we would feel safe. Neither one of us could swim properly but I did feel safe in the water, I could tread water all day.

Although her father did not teach Colleen and her sister how to swim, he encouraged physical activity by putting them in a water environment. Being immersed in the environment led to feelings of support and the motivation to keep with it.

Mercede's story led to discussing about parental influence and spousal influence, meaning that her lifestyle has encouraged her family and spouse to be active:

My daughter who has been watching me, she finally started getting really active in the last couple years since her kids are getting older. She has time, she goes to the gym regularly. I mean, quite frankly my husband who hates activity does it partly because he sees me being really active and he knows he should. He doesn't like but he does it anyway. He goes to the gym three times a week for an hour and he's like good, that's great, way better than nothing.

Throughout Jade's story, her concept of parental influence related to what she would witness in public and school settings:

But here if you stood at the door and you see all these older people come, they're all quite healthy, whereas if you stood at the Southgate mall by the food court, sometimes it takes you aback just how out shape some people are and what they are eating to compensate their lifestyle even more so. But they mentor their children and their grandchildren and that's their exercise, to walk to the mall and have their poutine, that's not very good is it?

Jade expressed that these parental influences are sending youth the wrong message by discouraging healthy behaviours.

The other side of the parental influence piece is related to illnesses and diseases contracted by participants' parents. Witnessing chronic conditions believed to be caused by a lack of physical activity appears to act as a motivator among participants to prevent chronic disease and a decreased quality of life. Mercede frames her story around

preventing diabetes. She explains:

So I have a strong family history of diabetes on both sides, that is a motivating factor to keep really active because both of my brothers who are not nearly as active as I am have marginal blood sugar that's creeping up and mine is rock bottom normal. So that's a motivator for me and I wish it would be a motivator for a lot of other people, they're not just harming themselves and making their lives more complicated and that uncomfortable, but they are costing the healthcare system a ton of money by just being sedentary.

Similarly, Jade indicates:

The background, family backgrounds, have something to do with why people do what they do or like the known expression, it's mind over matter, that type of thing that they don't, just get out of things, it's a certain kind of mindset. I know that my genes aren't that good or the family background isn't that good for various reasons some of it is genetic and some of it is lifestyle that you know I'm not going to smoke, and there is heart disease in the family so that's part of my reasons for taking on the programs that I do, yeah, so sometimes the whole history to the people that you are doing research on to compare that to you say who is say 50 years old, what's their reason for it?

Witnessing illness and the death of parents appears to act as a motivator for participants to reduce their risk of the same illnesses and premature death by being physically active. This discourse around family genetics influencing physical activity behaviour is how Jade and Mercede discuss a notion of coping. The negative experiences their families have had in relation to their health are an experience that these older adults were not willing to succumb to. On the other hand, there were participants whose discourse surrounded the experience of parents who encouraged regular physical activity. Despite these varied experiences, they have all led to a life of being physically active.

Life Organized Around Swimming. The sub-code of "life organized around swimming" refers to the dedication or allegiance to the Masters swimming club specifically and to physical activity more generally. This sub-theme "life organized

around swimming” emerges as a result of a deeper analysis focused on the notion of a “swimming lifestyle.”

It becomes habit, that’s all you do, it’s a habit and you know that, not that I don’t miss, I miss if I have to work but it’s a set time. So you do it Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturdays and if you can avoid it being at the same time of something else, you do. It’s a part of your schedule. I think that’s part of the key is to make it part of your schedule and the other key is social, if there is no aspect of social in it or even motivation to go because people aren’t going, I wouldn’t do it. I think that’s the key to getting people to do things is. That’s why it’s hard to do things at the gym because it’s much more sedentary, not sedentary, much more of an alone thing. Whereas you get the camaraderie of the pool, so that helps.
(Marilyn)

This idea that being a part of the Masters swim club encourages a habit and routine that best supports healthy behaviours to continue to participate in physical activity.

Participants adapt this lifestyle as these routines become engrained into their daily life. As

Marilyn describes, it is the motivation and social camaraderie that encourages a life scheduled around swimming. “[Swimming] is a major part of the routine” (Baileigh).

This scheduled routine is adapted and maintained by Bennett, “I switched my schedule for my swimming instead of before the swimming just fit with my schedule.” Colleen

adds, “I would say my life for a number of years has been organized around swimming.”

Having a schedule to swim was a part of Jade’s life, “Because I am retired there are other things in my life, but you know every Monday, Wednesday, Friday that’s what I do.”

While telling his story, Nevin described how important it was to maintain a life organized around swimming:

I think you know you have to, especially at my stage in life you have to have at least one day of rest. I’m not afraid to take a couple, if I’m tired I’ll take a couple days, but that doesn’t happen very often. But I mean if you’re kind of tired and that, sometimes you just need a couple days off. It does not bother me, but I don’t want to get in the habit of taking 2 weeks off for no reason at all. Like if you’re injured, that would be a reason. I try not to have unnecessary downtime shall we call it. And again having said

that, even just being tired might not be a bad idea to take a couple days off.

This quote illustrates that despite the importance placed upon swimming regularly, participants are able to take the rest that is needed from the sport.

Summary. Life organized around swimming provides insight into the importance of swimming and impact on other facets of participants' lives. This sub-theme's narrative helpsto explain the value swimming has upon these participants and the reasons why their participation is engrained in their daily lives. Organizing other aspects of one's life to accommodate swimming is a constant for participants.

Support and motivation is influenced by narrative discourses that are rewarding and interesting values told by each of my Masters swimmer participants. The value to have a group to be social and active with is outstanding to each of them. Their narratives are constructed around the positive ways the swim club optimizes their social fitness, their friendships, and social support networks. Their reality of a social physically active environment encourages them to participate in a long-term commitment to a club and organize their life around swimming. Many of these swimmers have maintained their membership for longer than five years, which speaks to the benefits that they receive. They feel connected and supported, which influences their continued participation. There is a discourse around accountability to participate and receiving the benefit of social networking. The significance to the Masters swim club and the positive social influences play a large narrative throughout the Masters swimmers. Its significance is so prominent that they consider swimming to keep them healthy and to be described as a "social club with a swimming problem."

Swimming Keeps Me Healthy

This theme refers to an overall sense of well-being through swimming participation and describes the personal experiences of the participants' involvement in swimming. It begins to illuminate participants' thoughts regarding how an active lifestyle can influence health benefits. The sub-themes contained within this theme are *swimming reducing injury*, *health decline when not swimming*, *swimming helps arthritic pain*, and *frames the mind*. Jade explains the versatility of health benefits she receives from swimming this way:

It keeps me disciplined to do healthy things, as a senior living on my own independently, so it keeps me healthier physically and healthier socially, and as increased friendships that you ordinarily wouldn't have had if you didn't join an activity.

This explains the feeling of participating in a regular physical activity and beliefs regarding the positive health and social outcomes of physical activity. This theme describes a participant's overall sense of wellbeing through swimming participation and how this positively influences different aspects of their lives, with respect to health.

Swimming Reducing Injury. Swimming reducing injury refers to participants' experiences with injuries while engaging in swimming. For some participants, injury does not significantly impact their participation. This does not mean that a severe injury would be ignored and they would continue to participate. However, participants are keen about modifying a stroke or easing into a practice while dealing with an injury. In fact, when dealing with injuries, participants receive support from their surgeons and/or physiotherapists due to water's resistance and role in aiding in healing.

Swimming reduced injury in Jenelle's case:

I had a torn meniscus in my knee, an injury that qualified for surgery. As I waited surgery I continued to do yoga and swim, while modifying the

activity to further prevent aggravation of my injury. I then recognized that continuing to participate in yoga and swimming, my knee healed in such a functional way that I was no longer qualified for surgery. I used to do a lot of running, but I've damaged my knee so I try to be careful with that a little. Which swimming is helping.

In Bennett's story, he describes his transition from running to swimming:

Yeah, I was waiting for surgery for an MCL tear and I could not run at all and I had limited leg movement, I tried deep water running, it was so boring - it was terrible, so boring. So I'm waiting for surgery, I couldn't run, but I could swim, it helped.

Mercede describes the act of modifying a swim to reduce injury and continue participating:

I have had to modify my swimming from time to time, I still do in fact, because with my artificial knee, I'm not allowed to do whip kick, and it's my natural stroke, my natural way of kicking by far the best and I can't, I couldn't for years because my knee hurt, and then I got it replaced and I still can't because you can't put that work on an artificial limb. So I've had to modify things a bit, but for the most part, swimming is just wonderful for keeping your body moving. But it's really good because with my old shoulder injury, I had to have my shoulder replaced a few years ago, my surgeon was delighted that I was a swimmer. I have practically full range of motion, not quite but most. And it's basically from swimming, so it's helped a lot.

The idea of continuing to participate in swimming while enduring an injury could be a foreign concept to some people, however for these swimmers it is a part of the lifestyle and they have found success while continuing to engage in the activity. These stories reflect the role of swimming on injury rehabilitation and health.

Health Decline When Not Swimming. The sub-theme 'health decline when not swimming' refers to perceived negative health impacts when participants are not engaged in swimming or other physical activity. This is explained through Naomi's story when enduring a shoulder injury:

Two-weeks in, I wasn't sleeping, which was making it worse and this shoulder was so stiff and sore after two weeks, I said to her, 'I can't keep

doing this!’ She says, no this was not the result I was looking for, go back to swimming, but at least we know it was worse not swimming. No question. Yes really interesting because at first I thought, yeah she’s probably onto something I better do what she says. And I couldn’t sleep, I just, it was awful, I was stiff, I was sore, I was grumpy. I’m going back to swimming! She said go for it. I mean when you are used to being active and having things come easy and not having things hurt, it’s quite a wake-up call when you get older, despite all of what I’ve been doing all my life I’m still getting torn rotator cuffs, and bursitis in the hip, and pinched nerve in my back. I’ve always been thinking what would I be like if I wasn’t active?

Naomi recognized her injuries while swimming and modified her stroke to reduce injury.

The perceived positive impact swimming has on one’s health, despite incurring in injury, influences participants’ decisions to continue in the sport.

Marlene made a connection between swimming and reducing chronic illnesses like hypertension:

Reducing chronic diseases, perhaps, you can’t always. You may decrease them, like I do know of people who have had a high hypertension and then this one lady lost weight and became more physically active and she reduced the amount of medication she required to maintain her blood pressure, so in the end, a minimal dose. So that’s what you do, it might prevent you from getting Type Two Diabetes, which is not a good condition to get. It has, aging has these things that you have to consider but if you hopefully are physically active you might delay their onset.

This excerpt articulates Marlene’s understanding of what a lack of physical activity can do to the body and how increasing physical activity can influence positive health outcomes. Becoming physically active and participating in a sport like swimming improves quality of life and helps maintain physical function in later life. The continuous engagement of swimming and outcomes of reduced health declines were experiences that these participants had in relation to their healthy lifestyles.

Swimming Helps Arthritic Pain. Four participants had arthritis and express through their stories that swimming positively influenced their experience in dealing with

this chronic illness. Furthermore, the specific sport of swimming is understood to have a positive impact on arthritic symptoms. The common theme between these swimmers experiencing arthritis is that participation can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can lend awareness to your pain whereas on the other, it can decrease and minimize the pain when participating. Bennett describes the idea of participating in swimming and experiences of arthritis this way:

You have to experience pain to succeed, you have to be careful because if you do too much, it hurts, you over-amp and make the arthritis worse and you don't do enough and it's just as bad. Swimming helps but it's a double edge-sword.

The idea of the double-edged sword is to feel and experience pain yet be able to continue to participate in physical activity and to work through the pain. Colleen further adds to experiencing pain:

Being able to determine what that pain is, is it a functional pain, is it going to go away? Or if I keep moving or is it going to keep aching. That's just experience and I know, I don't push myself past a certain point, I just don't because then I might not be able to do it at all.

Understanding functional pain is learned through experience and listening to your body.

Marilyn notes that swimming keeps you aware of where the aches and pains are but how the water can help these pains:

It tells me where the pains are, the thinking is, and it's better to keep active than to let things cease up, for sure I think it helps. The water is easy on our body compared to running, the pounding and stuff, the water helps.

Arthritis plays a significant role in Mercede's life, as it affects her knees, hands, and back. She also underwent surgeries to fuse joints and had titanium placed in her shoulder. This did have an impact on her swimming career, however, rather than quit swimming, she was able to modify her strokes to continue swimming with the club. Thus, due to

regular participation in swimming and modifying strokes when needed, she has regained the majority of her range of motion in her shoulder. “My surgeon was delighted to learn that I was a swimmer and encouraged my swimming” (Mercede). The water positively impacted the recovery of her joints from her surgery, which added value to the importance swimming has to her health. The stories these swimmers tell indicates beliefs about how the water resistance can positively influence arthritis and improve health and well-being.

Frames the Mind. Swimming has many physical benefits, but it is also important to consider how it may contribute to mental/psychological well-being. Participants describe the mental benefits swimming has in older adulthood and how this can positively influence life’s challenges. Participants perceive both mental and physical benefits to swimming. For example, Jade indicates, “I feel like it benefits me and my health and my mental attitude and my emotional attitude for doing regular exercise of swimming that I do.” Similarly, Marlene describes the research that is emerging about active lifestyles and mental capabilities, “Now they actually are proving research wise that remaining active is very good for you mentally and of course physically as well.” Marlene also points out that her involvement in swimming is based on the fitness, social and mental benefits:

So I think the Masters has a whole lot different benefits than just exercise, there’s that psychological thing that, that’s what attracted me to it, rather than just swimming lengths and getting actually bored with it as well.

Nevin touches upon the psychological and motivational aspect of positively framing your mind to be engaged in the activity,

To be honest with you, a lot of times I have to drag myself down to the pool, like in the cold weather, thinking of a million excuses, I kind of have to say, I know when I get there that I’m going to see everybody and I’m going to feel great. If

practice is good, or even if it's lousy there's still a good feeling, you came, you did your best, maybe you didn't do very well, but you were there.

Colleen further addressed how swimming can frame the mind for her mental health,

Often, when I get in the pool I can change the pH of the water because it just dissipates, but I can't swim all day. But when I'm in the pool it's completely meditative, zoned out, very therapeutic. I'm old and I won't stop doing it because I feel so much better, and one of the things about swimming right now, because the divorce situation and that I've lost a bit of myself, it's been a rough 3 years, but I don't have any anxiety when I'm in the pool.

Swimming influenced a positive frame of mind for Colleen as she has dealt with her challenges in life.

The sub-code of "frames the mind" illustrates the recognition that swimming can have a variety of important impacts on one's mental health and psychological well-being. These positive impacts contribute to continued physical activity engagement among these Masters swimmers. Framing the mind introduced a discourse that helped to understand that swimming influences more benefits than just physical capabilities.

Summary. The discourse for many of these Masters swimmers surrounds facing chronic diseases, illnesses, divorce, hardships, and how swimming seems to be a mechanism to cope with these factors. Swimming is a support in their lives, it forms the discourse that although there may be things that arise in life that cause challenges, having something to bring you to a place of peace, resiliency, and coping can derail the negative outcomes of the hardships. Therefore, for these swimmers who have experienced these challenges, having a support within the swimming club, and the ability to cope with the adversities are ways to focus on eliminating the negatives.

There are only a few of these Masters swimmers who are not coping with a chronic disease, such as, arthritis. Therefore, in the discourse surrounding coping and support, these swimmers value their time in the swimming pool to either alleviate painful

symptoms, or to pronounce these symptoms. There is a narrative around arthritis and physical activity presenting a double-edged sword, which means that it can either voice the pain or decrease the pain. However, with each end of the sword, there is a sense of support and coping within the pool to not discourage or deter physical activity. This further leads to the idea that there is not anything left in the pool, whether it is painful symptoms or a lack of pain. The narrative construction around coping and support with physical activity is something that arose in the conversations of these Masters athletes. It displays a reality that swimming participation is an outlet to go through divorce, illness, and the death of a loved one. These discourses influence the ways in which swimming keeps these Masters swimmers healthy and continues their physical activity engagement as they age.

Swimming Helps the Aging Process

The final theme, “Swimming helps the aging process,” refers to participants’ perceptions and experiences of aging. Generally, participants do not speak positively about aging and age-associated changes such as having less time in life, decreased mobility and range of motion, and chronic illness. However, it is also the case that some participants indicate aging is not something that she/he think about on a regular basis. This theme captures the complex understandings of aging and health and how it is experienced and interpreted among Masters athlete swimmers. Sub-themes within this theme include *attitude and aging*, *age and competition*, and *acceptance and awareness*.

Attitude and Aging. Understanding the aging process can be thought of as a positive experience depending on the perceived attitudes from an individual or society. The sub-theme, “attitude and aging,” represents participants’ descriptions of their

perceptions and experiences of aging—particularly through a Masters swimmer lens. This sub-theme also influences the attitudes of aging for Masters swimmers. The perception of aging is described through Naomi’s belief that, “Every age frames its different joys and pleasures.”

A unifying thread across participants’ stories is the displeasure of getting older. For example, according to Mercede:

I have trouble with it. Yeah. I have to keep telling myself it’s okay if you’re not as fast as you used to be you are almost 70 years old. I don’t like it because, well I love my life, I have a great life, I have a wonderful husband, great kids, grandkids, wonderful activities, two horses which is my life’s dream to have horses, and I don’t like getting older thinking the end is in sight. But being active and with the swim club, keeps me mentally, I don’t worry about it as much, I have come to terms with getting older, I’m trying to. It’s not easy.

Marilyn expresses her distain this way:

It sucks. It’s like my mother says, getting old is not for sissies, and the golden years aren’t so golden but yeah not there yet. I think, what can a person do to influence how they age? You can keep in shape, you can eat right, you can treat your body well, you don’t abuse your body and I think that’s the best you can do.

Stories unfold about participant’s attitude of aging as disappointment and discontent. These attitudes are expressed within the context of trying to fight aging, redefine aging, and deny aging. Given aging is viewed primarily as negative, many spoke of “fighting” it. For example, relating this fight to a previous battle with cancer, Bennett explains, “It’s not fighting the aging per se, it’s fighting the results of the disease.” Bennett seemed to find that he had to work harder in sport as his level of fatigue was at an all-time high, and his energy sometimes insufficient. This means that he worked harder, not only due to his competitive nature, but also due to his attitude that he would not let the disease control his life.

Furthermore, this attitude appeared based on understanding the difference between fighting the aging process and fighting the results of illness and disease. For Bennett, his fight is directed toward fighting the results of cancer. This is not to suggest that aging and disease go hand-in-hand, but rather to illustrate the fight against ageist stereotypes.

The attitude to age well is highlighted through Bennett's story:

To age well is to share your love of life with other people and be involved in the community. Aging well has got to do with luck, to some extent, a large extent, you get a stroke or you get cancer, you get, you know, a lot of those are you can't predict who's going to get that necessarily.

Marilyn's explanation builds on Bennett's that often illness could be inevitable:

The rest of it is determined by your genes, if you have the good genes and the good longevity in your family and you don't do anything stupid, like jump off a cliff or something, chances are you'll have a long life and you'll age okay, I mean I've got arthritis, that's the big thing that bothers me and it runs in my family and I don't think a lot I can do about it, right. So yeah, I don't like those things, of course in your mind you don't feel as old as you are but it's going to happen to everybody. As they say, it's better than the alternative.

An individual's genetic and family history also appear to influence participants' personal attitudes towards the aging process. "Dementia is a part of my family history and I value staying mentally and physically active to prevent or delay the onset of this disease" (Jade). For Jade, swimming is seen to benefit her health and contribute to a positive emotional and mental attitude. This idea that swimming can encourage a positive aging experience occurs when there is focus to health as a value of life.

The combination of mental, physical, and social fitness allows the ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle with healthy behaviours with regards to one's health. Mercedes highlights this combination and how it influences her sense of aging well:

Maintaining your health in the broadest sense, as long as you can and making good use of it everyday, as time gets shorter and so being, helping yourself, oneself to, by doing the things that we know are very helpful as

you get older. So being physically, mentally, and socially active.

Colleen's attitude toward aging is bound up in becoming ill. Thus, she is mindful of trying her best to avoid the healthcare system whenever possible. "Trying to stay as healthy as you can and a big motivation for me is, the healthcare system is a mess and I want nothing to do with it." Consistent with Colleen's views, aging successfully, at least in part, entails preventing illness – and more particularly, avoiding the healthcare system.

In contrast, Nevin speaks of quality of life and aging:

I know in the case of my sister-in-law she lived a perfect life, she exercised, she was a teacher, she was involved, nice person, good mother, she did everything right. Motivate me? Well, I have to realize exercise is wonderful but it doesn't mean you're going to live to be 100, in our swim club, we had a 55 -year old woman, pass away Pancreatic cancer, she was probably the fastest in the 55-60 age group in the world. Ferocious trainer and a lovely lady and all that but boy it [cancer] happened and in 9 months she was gone. There's an example of a woman doing pretty well everything right, one of the guys I worked with, he did everything wrong, he drank, he smoked, bad attitude, accident-prone, the whole thing and he lived to be 95. The only the thing is, I think that people, like the lady who only lived to be 55, they were 55 good years. I'd take her 55 good years over my friend's 95, where he was a vegetable really, well he was okay but I mean, not the high quality of life. Quality of life, at least you get a longer quality of life by working out, you might not live longer than somebody who's done everything wrong. The quality is better, let's hope.

The quality of life that you perceive to be important is an attitude of aging, which is subjectively defined and determined by your behaviour. Furthermore, there is a significant influence on your health dependent on your attitude toward aging. If you value your health, your focus and attitude generally influence healthy behaviours such as physical activity. The attitude of aging while maintaining a level of physical activity, such as swimming, can enhance the aging process and your function.

Age and Competition. Participants' views on aging are further understood through explanations of what it is like to be an older competitive athlete. For example, Baileigh comments on the interesting aspect of competing with all age ranges, "So you

could be swimming with 20 year olds but then your time is spewed out in your 5-year increment. So it's kind of interesting." Bennett finds the competition interesting within

Masters swim clubs as it does not perpetuate any ageist stereotypes:

And when you're competing you're competing not based on age, so not based on a stereotype, you're competing on performance and in a race I might be competing against 50 year old, a 60 year old, and a 70 year old but we all have the same time for that particular event and the results are graded against my age group but the actual participation and event is with people younger and older and whatever and that's unique from any other sport. I was telling you about that 80 year old who got in and yeah, he couldn't dive, he had his daughter 65 and she's helping him get in the pool, a senior, and so he has to climb in the stairs, he can't get on the podium, and he has to climb down, and he swam and the whole place was watching him and then he finished and he got this round of applause, and he got out and he's got his walker, and holy shit, he just swam 400 metres or something like that you know. So that when you're in situations like this then stereotypes disappear.

Mercede speaks about the concept of age and competition experiences:

So I won all my heats, because I was the only one in the age group. That's kind of neat when you get older, it's fun. It's kind of fun, the oldest person there, the oldest woman. Anyways I was the only in my age category, so that's one of the neat things about Masters swimming, is that once you get up there, even though you are a lot slower, you still get recognition for being there doing it, because they are fewer people the older you get.

Furthermore, age and competition as it relates to Masters swimming competitions are a unique way to diminish ageist discourses and age stereotypes.

Bennett goes on to talk about the differences in Masters swim events:

You know, Masters, you have different levels of the Masters, there's the Seniors Games and then there's Swim Canada, Seniors Games are fun games, okay. And so they don't have, they're not, they don't have a clock and they're not timed, okay. Whereas when you go to a meet, there's the times are registered with Swim Canada, your times are official and all that and I think that's, when you think about Masters running, they do the same thing and they have Masters Games and people come in and very different.

Marlene describes the Masters level experience with competition and discusses the effort and the motivation to continue to compete as an older adult. From her perspective:

I really think it encourages them to think that oh yes, when I get that old I can do that kind of thing. I hope that's what it does. When you think of, even in synchro there, we've had the odd competitor who's been in her 80s, they don't swim fast but they are there and they do their routine and so on. I'm hoping that people who are younger take it as an example and maybe can strive to realize that they don't have to turn in their swim suit or shoes or whatever when they're 60 or something.

Her description of continued sport participation in a competitive capacity clarifies her views on aging. Older athletes can be an example that physical activity does not have to be altered because of your age, or, more specifically, that you do not have to discontinue sport competition due to age.

Acceptance and Awareness. The acceptance and awareness of aging is described through participant's understanding of the aging process. Acceptance looks different for all the participants and how one appeared to handle accepting change is different from person to person. The acceptance of aging is a way of understanding the changing aging body and to continually move forward in life and activity. For Bennett, the notion of acceptance is illustrated with his frustrations with his arthritis and becoming slower in the pool:

I think that's [acceptance] what I've gotten from swimming now, so my arthritis is bad, so you know, my knees are shot and the pain, I accept as part of what I'm doing in my life, you know. I could be pissed off at it but I don't get pissed off in competition pain so why would I get pissed off at this? It's just something you accept and deal with, you don't feel bad about it you don't blame anyone, and it's just the way it is.

Through Bennett's experience of acceptance, he realizes the level of gratitude he has for being able to participate at any level. With all his injuries, aches, pains, or illnesses aside, it is all about getting in the water and being able to experience the sport.

Now I jump in the pool after you know, missing a couple of exercises, a couple of sessions, because your rotator cuff was sore and that, and you jump in the pool and first thing I say is, thank you, thank you. It's just that gratitude of being able to do and experience things instead of what I can't

do, that so many people think what I can't do instead of what you got, what do you got right now, what are you doing right now and that's what aging gives you, that allows me to do.

Bennett's aging experience gives him the ability to have a sense of gratitude to experience physical activity in any capacity. This gratitude is a great example of having the acceptance and awareness to be a part of a club that encourages physical activity at any age.

The awareness of aging and the acceptance of the aging body through continued swimming participation are important to all participants. "I certainly don't swim as fast as I did 10 years ago but you know that's okay. I swim faster than the person who doesn't swim at all." (Jade).

This is an important mindset to consider when having recognized this change in the body. This awareness is about recognizing that you do not need to quit swimming or quit participating in other sports you are now slower at; the awareness is about going for the same level of enjoyment with a different outcome of exertion.

I'm going for the same level of exertion, same level of enjoyment, it doesn't matter what I actually do to, like if I used to ski a double black run and now I ski a blue run, and I get as much enjoyment out of it I don't notice it, it's like I'm still having a great day skiing. So yeah, I definitely think there are some things that are changing, I think it's only smart to just push your body to the same level as you always have so that's going to mean so you're accomplishing a little bit less and that's totally fine, like we're still skiing. (Jenelle)

Nevin describes aging and acceptance this way, "I think aging well would be accepting it, it's happening to me now, it's happened to a lot of people and it's going to happen to everybody. And it's something that we have to deal with it."

From participants' points of view, understanding that challenges and difficulties will arise as she/he ages is an opportunity to learn and grow; helping to recognize the

importance one places on their own aging experience. Furthermore, Masters' swimming is seen as a way to enhance the aging process.

Summary. Participants' aging discourses are similar in some respects, but also reveal differences. For example, each participant is aware of their aging and the process they had been going through, whether it is perceived as positive or negative. Some of the participants recognize their age simply by a birthday passing, as they were still able to maintain the same level of activity as they had in previous years of their life. Others notice the aches and pains of aging, in terms of joints and muscles, but there are not any experiences that led to any unwillingness to be physically active. The rest of the participants consistently thought of their aging and made choices in their life to cope with their aging. Although there are different ways of explaining their attitudes to aging and their aging process, each swimmer has an ability to recognize and reflect what their aging experiences has looked like for them. For instance, the narrative discourse of maintaining a healthy lifestyle of physical activity and a balanced diet is an integral part of a swimmer's experience, as there is the desire to have more time spent with family and friends. However, the main narrative of these swimming participants is the ability to come to terms with the aging process.

Coming to terms with aging is associated with the combination of the beliefs and values that are constructed through behaviour. The swimmers may not enjoy time lessening or being slower or having to age, but they are not dwelling on something that cannot be changed. What can be incorporated is a reality of healthy lifestyle behaviour of physical activity. The narratives do not represent the same scenario for each participant, however the common broader discourse shows the swimmers being at terms with the aging process. The narrative construction encourages the broader discourses of the

Masters athlete swimmers to emerge to understand their experiences as an older athlete. Their discourses place meaning on the research to providing understanding to what makes this group so unique and how we can learn from their narratives to encourage a healthier aging population.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This study utilized interpretive description methodology and thematic analysis, with an emphasis on participants' narratives, to represent and explore masters athlete swimmers' beliefs about their aging and health. The central research question and sub-questions were: How do masters athlete swimmers navigate multiple understandings of aging and physical activity?

Sub-Question 1: How do beliefs about aging influence swimming participation?

Sub-Question 2: How does swimming participation influence masters swimmers' experiences of, and beliefs about, aging?

Data analysis focused on constructing both overarching themes (and sub-themes) and unifying narratives from the data provided by 10 masters swimmers. This process has produced a rich and enlightened account of participants' experiences as masters swimmers. Data were organized into six major themes: *Feeling Your Best After a Swim*; *The Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs*; *The Swimmer Profiles*; *Support and Motivation*; *Swimming Keeps Me Healthy*; and *Swimming Helps the Aging Process*. This study provides unique insight into the nature of masters swimming among participants age 60 years and older. Importantly, the voices of these swimmers are captured through personal narratives of their experience as a masters swimmer. These data offer an important alternative to inquiry within sports and exercise science focused on physiological function and outcomes. Furthermore, interpretive description illuminates stories that can teach us about personal experiences of aging and the social nature of aging by the telling of what it is that I as the researcher have observed. The stories become illuminated as the participant's experiences, the data, brings awareness to the phenomena and the concept of sense-making is understood.

Key Findings

Based on the overarching themes and subthemes identified in chapter four, there were three main findings that contributed to the understanding of the phenomena of masters swimmers and their aging and health. As I immersed myself in the data and the experiences of these physically active older adults, I recognized three concepts that reflected the value of this phenomena: Managing an Aging Identity, Enhancing Personal Motivation, and Development and Social Relationships. Throughout my analysis of each of the six themes, these three values of being motivated, maintaining social networks, and coping with the aging process informed how my research questions were understood and contributed to the literature. This chapter is organized first by identifying the key areas that addressed the overarching research questions of this study. This introduction to how my research questions have been answered will guide the reader as I discuss the three sections of my key findings in depth and how they have contributed to relevant literature. Lastly, this chapter includes: significance to public health/physical activity promotion, strengths and limitations, future research upon my findings, and my concluding comments of this study.

Central Research Question: How do masters athlete swimmers navigate multiple understandings of aging and physical activity?

The results of the experiences of these masters swimmers informed my central research question of how they navigate multiple understandings of aging and physical activity by narratively describing this as a lifestyle choice and the motivation and pleasure to be physically active. Many of these swimmers explained that their older adult years have contributed to a time in their life when they can focus on physical activity,

especially of the women who are able to contribute more of their time to physical activity since their children are grown. The swimmers' physical activity engagement was a valued and critical component of these participant's older adult years. The value, motivation, and pleasure encompassed by these participant's to remain physically active contributed to their navigation of their aging process. Furthermore, their navigation and understanding of aging surfaced once their children were grown, retirement was reached, and witnessing others' health deteriorating, these masters swimmers further focused on physical activity engagement in their lives. These contributors explained above were explanations in the swimmers stories, however, it is important to note that these participants have consistently maintained a lifestyle of physical activity throughout their lifestyle. Therefore, this lifestyle was further enhanced once they reached their older adult years of life. This lifestyle has become further enhanced as they recognize that they are aging, and they recognize that being physically active positively contributes to various experiences in their lives, specifically how they navigate and understand their own aging process. These experiences are explained through mental stimulation, social camaraderie among peers, and physical energy increases.

Sub-Question 1: How do beliefs about aging influence swimming participation?

Participants' understandings of aging and physical activity have contributed to lifelong physical activity engagement, while recognizing the benefits of this lifestyle towards feelings of energy, enjoyment, and support. These benefits enhanced their motivation related to continued physical activity, as their energy, enjoyment, and support drove their motivation to continue to be a physically active older adult participating in swimming. The findings around their beliefs of aging contributed to discussions of

managing their aging identity, which were thematically and narratively described as challenging attitudes, psychological aspects, and ageist stereotypes. Although many of these swimmers did not agree with any ageist stereotypes, they argued this was due to personality traits, and the experience of belonging to a club with diverse members.

Diverse members were explained to be swimmers of all age ranges, all coming together for the love and desire of swimming. Personality traits were explained as acknowledging or being aware of any ageist stereotypes was simply not a part of their personalities, meaning they did not look for this type of attitude from others. The common ground of being a part of a swim club allowed stereotypes to become unrecognizable or unfamiliar to associate with. The beliefs of aging encouraged the understanding of the narrative of swimmers' aging identity, which was influenced by the engagement of being an older adult swimmer that belonged to a club.

Sub-Question 2: How does swimming participation influence masters swimmers' experiences of, and beliefs about, aging?

Swimming participation influenced the swimmers' experiences and beliefs of aging through strengthened social relationships. These narrative findings discussed sport involvement and psychosocial outcomes, their social identity, camaraderie, and how these aspects of the swimming environment influenced their experiences to their aging process. Every single swimming participant described the level of value they placed on a club sport by the social camaraderie they experienced by their swimming peers. These swimmers formed friendships strictly by being involved in a masters swim club. These friendships contributed to lifelong relationships for many, and evolved to being travel companions. The camaraderie and social uniqueness of belonging to a masters swim club

influenced the routine of, swim then socialize, for each of my participants. Their social routines included, having coffee as a group after a swim workout, gathering for birthdays and other celebrations, and forming a 'social club' where social outings are planned outside of the swimming pool.

These strengthened social relationships positively influenced their psychosocial outcomes and feelings of belonging and involvement, which all encouraged healthy aging experiences as one adapts from a work identity into a swimmer identity. The discourse of the experiences as a physically active older adult, was that having a schedule that included regular physical activity with the added benefit of being social, influenced positive aging experiences. Positive aging experiences were recognized as continuing the engagement in an important activity in their lives, such as physical activity. This was recognized to influence a positive aging experience, as it deterred the focus of actually aging. These older adults were simply engaged in physical activity, which contributed to many beneficial factors, and they just so happened to be aging simultaneously. Furthermore, this meant that aging was not always a constant thought by these participants. Though for some, the motivators of health and reducing illness and disease encouraged their physical activity engagement, which coincided with aging. However, for these participants their experiences of aging remained positive, as they reaped the same benefits as those who did not think about aging, such as, psychosocial outcomes.

Summary. This unique population of masters athlete swimmers provides a differing perspective of aging and physical activity. The key findings in my study of: *Managing an Aging Identity, Enhancing Personal Motivation, and Development and Social Relationships* provide a narrative experience of the masters swimmers and how these experiences reflect upon my research questions. The experiences of these masters

swimmers navigating multiple understandings of aging and physical activity was narratively described as a lifestyle choice and the motivation and pleasure to be physically active. Their understandings of aging and physical activity have contributed to lifelong physical activity engagement, while recognizing the benefits of this lifestyle towards feelings of energy, enjoyment, and support. The findings around their beliefs of aging contributed to discussions of managing their aging identity, which were narratively described as challenging attitudes, psychological aspects, and ageist stereotypes. Furthermore, swimming participation influenced the swimmers' experiences and beliefs of aging through strengthened social relationships. These narrative findings discussed sport involvement and psychosocial outcomes, their social identity, and camaraderie. Taken together, the thematic and narrative findings generated from this study support the interpretation that participants are a "different" kind of older adult group, as they view being physically active contributes to a healthier aging process from the benefits they receive from this active lifestyle. These swimmers reflected on their personal journeys in the sport and how this created motivation and sustained participation, to enable participants to remain physically active as they aged (Dionigi, 2002; Dionigi, Baker, Horton, 2011; Lithopoulos, Rathwell & Young, 2015; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Rathwell & Young, 2014; Young & Medic, 2011). These three overarching key findings contribute to the results of my research questions, which further aids our understanding of masters swimmers' participation as they age.

Managing An Aging Identity

The participation in masters sport as an older adult is challenging society's negative attitudes and perceptions of older adults as physically inactive. Participants in

this study explained the resistance of such stereotypes and reinforce them by being engaged in physical activity as an older adult. The resistances to stereotypes through sport participation have also been discussed by Dionigi, 2015; Horton, Baker, Cote, & Deakin, 2008; Kirby & Kluge, 2013; Baker, Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2010. My findings indicated that participants valued their health, and their focus and attitude generally influenced healthy behaviours, by being physical active. This experience presents great value as we look to enhance a healthier aging population, with reduced chronic illnesses and diseases. These participants found that their investment in physical activity and the benefits of this participation diminished many negative attitudes towards aging (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2008). The negative perceptions of aging in dominant discourse have been referred to as a fixed biological chronology, which intricately ties cultural pressures and expectations across the lifespan (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2008). These cultural pressures are constructed based on aging as a decline rather than the social contexts in which aging is situated. This situated aging is based on individuals constructing an alternative cultural context of aging and physical activity. In fact, the participants found that their attitude of aging while maintaining a level of physical activity, such as swimming, enhanced their aging process and their function. These attitudes of aging have been socially situated and informed by the environment of a masters swim club, for example. The attitudes shift as a part of individuals coming together, regardless of age, to all participate in the sport.

The literature on masters athletes suggest that we need to better understand the experiences of sport and physical activity among older adult populations (Ferrari, Bloom, Gilbert, Caron, 2017). Masters athletes are challenging people's attitudes as they continue with their investment in sport participation. If older adults cast later life in a different light, they are able to consider themselves an exception to the "rule", which can influence

feelings of satisfaction and personal empowerment (Dionigi, 2006). Older athletes move beyond negative depictions of “old age” and what is “senior appropriate” (Grant, 2001). However, historically the research upon masters athletes has been focused on the relationship of physiological aspects and performance levels (Tarpinning, Hamilton-Wessler, Wiswell & Hawkins, 2004). Masters athletes have also been focused in research through their age decline and sport performance (Baker & Schorer, 2010). Therefore, an emerging body of research has delved into the psychological aspects of masters athletes sport participation (Dionigi, 2002; Dionigi, Baker, Horton, 2011; Lithopoulos, Rathwell & Young, 2015; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Rathwell & Young, 2014; Young & Medic, 2011).

The mindset of aging helps to change the preconceived notions of how aging is seen to be negative in society. If we are able to frame our minds differently towards how aging is experienced and facilitated, we can introduce a narrative around how we can positively manage an aging identity (Dionigi, 2006, 2011, 2015; Stevenson, 2002; Baker, Horton, Weir, 2010; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2008; Kirby & Kluge, 2013; Grant, 2001). Furthermore, managing an aging identity was identified to be an important part of why participants are motivated to keep swimming and how their beliefs about aging contribute to their swimming participation, one of my overarching research questions of this study. Our attitudes of aging and changing our frame of mind can influence the rejection of ageist attitudes or stereotypes. In fact, many swimmers were not bothered when experiencing ageist attitudes. Rather it caught them off-guard because their own view of their aging is translated differently as they continue to engage in physical activity with individuals of various ages.

Previously, high-level physical activity among older adults was thought to be life threatening or too demanding for the aging body, and sports were thought to be inappropriate or not enjoyable for older people (Coakley, 2001; Grant; Hargreaves, 1994; Kluge, 2002; Vertinsky, 1995). A positive aging discourse emerged in the fields of gerontology and healthcare (Bevan & Jeeawody, 1998; Davis, 1994; Rowe & Kahn, 1998), exercise promotion (Laura & Johnston, 1997; O'Brien Cousins, 1998; van Norman, 1995), and leisure (Dupuis, 2002; Fontane & Hurd, 1992). Research is uncovering that participating at a high level of physical activity in an organized club like these individuals are doing, creates a new aging narrative (Dionigi, 2015; Horton, Baker, Cote, & Deakin, 2008; Kirby & Kluge, 2013; Baker, Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2010; Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Therefore, these positive aging discourses are no longer framing aging as the domain of frailty, sickness, and immobility. Rather, individuals like the participants of this study are challenging these stereotypes by continuing to participate in sport and physical activity into their later years. The literature is starting to suggest that this is due to the psychological and social health benefits of sport involvement in older adulthood (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, Payne, 2013; Dionigi, 2006; Martin-Mathews, 2011). The social benefits were tremendously valued in the findings of this research, each participant created a narrative around uniqueness and value of social aspects in sport. Interestingly, many participants recognize that ageist stereotypes exist, some often have been exposed to stereotyped circumstances but do not contribute to this type of thinking. Baker, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2010) and Baker, Horton et al. (2010) suggested that as masters athletes are able to overcome ageist stereotypes, since they are able to position themselves as physically active through sport participation when the majority of older adults are physically inactive. Therefore, these positive experiences of being involved in a

physically active lifestyle further contributes to how this informs the swimmers' beliefs and understanding of their aging, which informs my overarching research questions of this study.

The narratives around being active for a lifetime that were discussed in my research were told as these swimmers recognized how they view their own identity. This meant that being viewed as a swimmer or as a physically active person was related to a recognized importance towards being an active person for a lifetime. As Baker et al. (2010) suggested, successive sport involvement represented a primary adaptive strategy for coping with the process of aging, as it can enhance one's social relationships, the development of personal identity, and general propensity of lifelong physical activity. In light of my research, successive sport involvement was a value taken from these swimmers experiences. Physical activity was thought to be a pleasure, which encompassed numerous benefits to their lives. They felt physical and mental benefits of being engaged in physical activity, which pooled into feelings of gratification, support, and perseverance through life. Swimming was a constant in each of their lives, it was interpreted to have immense value and encouraged how they have determined their aging experiences. The swimmers thought of aging as disappointing or it was not a constant thought in their minds, however what brought them all on the same level was how swimming positively influenced these thoughts and experiences. Their involvement in swimming overflowed into their social relationships, motivational behaviours, and attitudes towards aging.

Enhancing Personal Motivation

The experiences of motivation related to continued physical activity were explained through, lifelong physical activity, energy, enjoyment, supportive environment, and the sport commitment of participants of this study. Dionigi (2002) reported that masters athletes attributed their continued participation in sport to viewing themselves as competitive on the field and having friendly and social demeanours off the field, although this mindset did not necessarily resonate with my participants specifically, the aspect of completing a workout and then maintaining social networks were identified through my participants. However, these swimmers did feel their own personal drive and motivation in relation to how they are engaged in swimming. Participants also noted maintaining one's health and enjoying the benefits of physical activity as reasons to continue sport participation (Dionigi, 2002), which was a main contributor to their navigation and understanding of aging and maintaining a level of physical activity, which informs my overarching research question of this study. The literature indicates further reasoning of participation is included through enjoyment, desire for personal achievement, winning, social networking, and health and fitness reasons (Hastings, Cable, Zahran, 2005; Hastings, Kurth, Schloder & Cyr, 1995; Stevenson, 2002; Tantrum & Hodge, 1993). These reasons contribute to the motivation that is gained from participation and the impact that physical activity has upon older adults' aging experiences and how that process is understood among them. Participants of this study described psychosocial factors as integral factors to their motivations of, lifelong physical activity, energy, enjoyment, supportive environments and support to swim, and sport commitment. Psychosocial factors are important to recognize as they encourage our understanding of how these swimmers stay motivated and engaged in sport in later life.

The older adult populations are starting to further recognize that this period of life is a time of active involvement, productivity, growth, and development (Dionigi, 2006). The literature has a large focus towards the physiological response to physical activity as an older adult, rather than the psychosocial aspects of sport participation and the unique consequences of their involvement and how it differs from general leisure-time physical activity (Baker, Fraser-Thomas et al., 2010; Dionigi, Baker, Horton, 2011; Weir, 2010). This gap in the literature suggests that our understanding of the experiences related to older adult physical activity needs to be explored. Furthermore, the sport involvement in older adulthood has contributed to many psychosocial outcomes, such as, assisting in the management of an aging identity, challenging and reinforcing traditional stereotypes of older adults, enhancing and inhibiting motivation related to continued physical activity involvement, opportunities to travel and participate in physical activity, and significantly encourage the development and strengthening of social relationships (Baker, Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2010, Dionigi, 2005, 2006; Dionigi & O'Flynn, 2007, Dionigi et al., 2011; Horton, Baker, Cote, & Deakin, 2008; Kirby & Kluge, 2013). These experiences are important as they allow the understandings related to physical activity and aging to be brought to light. Determining the experiences of older adults and physical activity in relation to how they navigate multiple understandings and beliefs of their aging process and this achievable lifestyle is important to discuss among others to encourage healthier aging populations.

Development and Social Relationships

As previously mentioned, participants cited many reasons to explain their continued participation in sport. These psychosocial outcomes are of interest to

researchers, since sport in older adulthood is recognized to enhance health and well-being throughout the lifecourse (Baker, Fraser-Thomas et al., 2010). A particularly salient motivational psychosocial factor was the social benefits associated with participation in swimming. The evidence in the literature describes that psychological and social benefits of older adults and sport involvement contributes to internal motivation, and the enjoyable nature of the social context influences improved psychological and social health (Eime et al., 2013).

These psychosocial outcomes were often richly described through the storied experiences of study participants. The positive psychosocial outcomes further influenced their navigation of aging and physical activity. These thoughts and behaviours around the support, motivation, and environment associated towards the involvement in a masters swim club was an important contribution to the participation of these swimmers. This means that the dynamics of having a social and mental stimulation while maintaining a level of physical activity was a significant influence to masters swim club members and reasons their continued efforts of a physically active lifestyle while aging was an important component. These reasons helped to inform my overarching research questions of this study as it introduces how these masters swimmers are navigating multiple understandings of aging and physical activity, and addresses the beliefs contributing to their participation.

The socialization experienced by these swimmers being involved in the swim club as an older adult represented a large narrative within this research. Swimming influenced a sense of friendship, social circle, and social network among the members of the club. The social value combined with physical activity was described to be a large motivating factor to the idealistic membership among these participants. This value

informed their beliefs of physical activity and aging, meaning that these older adult swimmers experienced physical benefits to their swimming participation, but further felt social benefits to participating, a concept informing my central research question. These were reasons that informed their beliefs and practices around the ethos of masters swimming participation.

There was a described uniqueness that participating in a club kept its members honest in physical activity engagement and provided beliefs around having a social support system (Baker, Fraser-Thomas et al., 2010; Dionigi, 2005, 2006; Dionigi & O'Flynn, 2007; Dionigi et al., 2011; Horton, Baker, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Kirby & Kluge, 2013). The experiences of these motivating factors related to continued physical activity are important to recognize as we try to inform the practices and beliefs of masters swimmers to other populations for improved population health. The stories of these masters swimmers expressed the development and strengthening of sport club involvement to be largely related to the social relationships that were formed. These introduced the importance to further learning about the psychosocial outcomes contributing to participating as an older adult and how that informs how they navigate multiple understandings and beliefs about aging and physical activity, and how that relates to their identity and the camaraderie experienced.

Significance to Public Health and Health/Physical Activity Promotion

There is a need for evidence-based research to inform public health promotion practices to promote sport-related physical activity among older adults (Gayman, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, Horton, Baker, 2017). There has been gerontological research that has acknowledged the importance of psychological functioning among specific stages of

aging (Smith & Baltes, 1997). However, gerontological and public health research is needed for understanding the influence of sport involvement for older adults, as it relates to public health and physical activity promotion (Baker, Horton, Weir, 2010; Horton, Baker, Cote, Deakin, 2008; Prohaska, Belansky, Belza, Buchner, Marshall, McTigue, Satariano, Wilcox, 2006).

The findings of this study contribute to further our understanding of physical activity promotion and advance public health strategies for healthy aging. Healthy aging strategies at the public health level is important to understand as older adults age because they want to ‘age in place’ or live in their homes and communities for as long as possible (Yen & Anderson, 2012). Therefore, given the importance of mobility concerns, design features are needed to support mobility and how local areas can better prepare to support the health of their aging populations (Yen & Anderson, 2012). The significance of physical activity promotion in older adults is widely based on healthy public policy and how we can promote this type of behaviour to all populations. The efforts of healthy public policy are needed to reflect factors such as: rules, procedures, and conditions that support individuals’ abilities to make health-promoting choices (Yen & Anderson, 2012). There are several national strategies in place to create healthy and safe community environments such as National Prevention Strategy: America’s Plan for Better Health and Wellness and Healthy People 2020 (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2018) which focuses on creating social and physical environments that promote good health for all, among others to promote environment and healthy aging policy change.

The interaction between people and their physical, social, and political environments important influences for policy making and public health implementation (Boulton, Horne & Todd, 2017). The social ecological model (Sallis, Owen & Fisher,

2008) indicates that there are many levels of influence for physical activity engagement. At the individual level, the influences included: poor health or feeling that physical activity was an essential part of identity. Therefore, knowledge of the physical and psychological benefits of being active can be illustrated as an incentive for older adults to be physically active, while poor health acts as a barrier. The motivation to learn something new and have the mental stimulation of sport are shown to be new findings in research that can be contributed to physical activity promotion. At the interpersonal level, the social element of engaging in activities is demonstrated as an effective motivator to adhere to physical activity. At the environmental level, physical activity is needed to be promoted by flexibility, variety, adaptability, affordability, accessibility.

Therefore, policymakers can do much to improve the promotion of physical activity at multiple levels of the social ecological model. Specifically there should be more of a focus on the social benefits associated with physical activity promotion. The labels applied to physical activity promotion should be as open and inclusive as possible. Ease of access should also be considered, such as: cost and location. Furthermore, local government departments and health services should consider cost benefits in providing resources to support community-based activity sessions with a focus on enjoyable environments, as the health benefits of physical activity are well known. The significance of public health strategies towards physical activity promotion is needed for all populations, but more specifically for population aging and providing environments to create and support positive aging processes for older adults.

Strengths. The present study reflects several strengths. For example, the depth of the stories my participants shared was considered a strength by the amount of detail obtained from their experiences. The narrative influence from participants provided

extensive results due to the design of my data collection methods of semi-structured interviews. These results provided a deep analysis process, as the data collected was focused on narrative and thematic analyses. The analysis therefore contributed to an extensive understanding of the experiences of these masters swimmers, with a large data set. Another strength of this study included my approach to the analysis process, as I utilized a collaborative approach of by-hand methods and NVivo software analysis methods. The combination of NVivo and ‘manual’ methods of analysis provided the opportunity to interpret rich and meaningful descriptions of my data without being restricted by one analysis method.

Limitations. Despite the strengths identified, it is important to acknowledge several study limitations. As previously mentioned, the sample size lacked diversity among participants. Diversity is explained to reflect a diverse sample of participants from various ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. My sample included a group of individuals who had similar ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds, therefore the comparison against these groups did not exist in my study. Furthermore, diversity was limited with gender, as the majority of my participants were female. Lacking diversity among my participants is a limitation to this study as there is not a comprehensive understanding of physical activity and aging, as it relates to specific factors. This sample addresses a small scope of how we can understand and influence older adults physical activity participation.

Although the results of my study were quite extensive, a limitation of this study was that there were not any follow-up interviews conducted to ensure accurate description of the participants experience was maintained (Liamputtong, 2013). Follow-up interviews would have allowed for further clarification upon their interview transcripts. Although

this is classified as a limitation of my study, I chose not to conduct any to interfere with the initial quality of the data (Morse, 2000). The reason I chose not to conduct follow-up interviews was because I did not want the participant's to have the ability to 'change' or 'alter' their stories. Their stories would no longer become a raw and initial description of their experiences. These limitations are important to recognize as further research develops in this area.

Future Research

Further research is needed among the population of masters athlete swimmers, to be able to promote healthy aging as an important public health issue for upcoming generations. Psychosocial outcomes are of an important area of upcoming research in this area, as little is known about them, although we know that sport in older adulthood promotes the enhancement of health and well-being throughout the lifecourse (Baker, Fraser-Thomas et al., 2010). Psychosocial factors was a significant understanding of the reasons older adults remain physically active and how these factors contribute to a healthier aging process of managing an aging identity, enhancing personal motivation, and the development and social relationships.

Furthermore, within my research the older adults did not associate with the term 'athlete' rather they related to being an active individual, which is a limitation to current research and is factored to be a reason why masters sport needs to be promoted for all diverse groups rather than the elite and skilled athletes (Kirby & Kluge, 2013; Roper, Molnar & Wrisberg, 2003). A diverse group is needed to identify if there is a gendered element among masters swimmers, as this was a factor I was not able to obtain within my sample. Much of the research on masters sport involves a particular advantaged

demographic, who have the knowledge that physical activity is a necessary component to a healthy aging process. Future research must reach the populations who require this behaviour change to improve their quality of life and aging process. Nonetheless, current research indicates that this is a promising area for future research as we are further understanding that sport involvement in older adulthood is related to cognitive, emotional, social, and motivational outcomes (Gayman et al., 2017).

Concluding Comments

This study focused on advancing understanding of the phenomena of masters athlete swimmers and exploring how physical activity participation contributes to the aging experiences of participants. This study makes several important contributions to the literature and encouraged a deeper understanding of the idealistic engagement in masters swim club involvement. For instance, it expands the masters sport research by addressing psychosocial factors rather than only physiological factors. These psychosocial factors are under-researched and deserve attention to further understand the aspects that contribute to lifelong physical activity engagement, which can promote a healthier aging experience with reduced chronic illness. These psychosocial factors encourage experiences of, enhanced motivation related to continued physical activity, managing an aging identity, and encouraging development and strengthening of social relationships for these masters athlete swimmers.

The findings of this research serve as an important next step toward the development of comprehensive upstream and downstream approaches of public health, to advance adequate programming and policies for physical activity and aging. In terms of promoting physical activity among older adults, several factors appeared to be important

to consider with an aging identity and process. As Baker et al. (2010) suggested, successive sport involvement represented a primary adaptive strategy for coping with the process of aging, as it can enhance one's social relationships, the development of personal identity, and general propensity of lifelong physical activity. My research findings specifically capture an understanding to these strategies, which address public health promotion approaches of supportive environments and personal development as it relates to being a masters swimmer.

Specifically, the findings of this study suggest that physical activity promotion in older adulthood needs to be affordable, accessible, and culturally accepted. The masters athlete swimmers involved in this research study discussed areas that contributed to their participation including, privilege and willingness to be a member in the club, the ability to resist ageist stereotypes, and experienced support to be engaged in a masters swim club. However, since this research lacked a diverse sample of older adults, further research is needed to explore these factors upon older adults with adverse experiences. Although this study does not include a diverse sample, the findings from this group suggest that being involved in a team sport such as swimming encourages the ability to navigate multiple understandings of what it means to be a physically active older adult and how that influences their aging experiences. This is an important step toward understanding population aging and reducing preventable chronic illness and disease, and increasing the quality of life of older adults.

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Appendix A

Ethical Considerations

Approval for the proposed study was requested and approved from the University of Lethbridge Research Ethics Board on October 26, 2016. Participants would further indicate their willingness to participate in the proposed study through informed consent. An information letter which explains the details of the study, as well as the potential risks, was provided to each potential participant. They were also informed that participation is voluntary, and they may withdraw at any time. In addition, participants were provided with a description of the anticipated use of the data, and informed of how the results of the research will be communicated.

Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identity of participants. Confidentiality will be addressed by storing data on password-protected computers. Although anonymity cannot be completely maintained, only my research supervisor was aware of the identity of study participants.

Appendix B

Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me about how you first got involved in Masters swimming?
2. Where does swimming fit into your life now?
(Probe: Has swimming always played the same role in your life as it does now? Can you give me an example how?)
3. Why do you swim? What keeps you involved in swimming?
(Probe: Are you friends with other members of the club? What other sports are you currently involved in?)
4. Can you tell me how swimming influences your sense of health and well-being? Can you give me an example?
5. Has swimming influenced your identity (or how you view yourself)? Can you give me an example?
6. How would you describe aging? What does aging mean to you?
(Probe: Please provide me with an example that illustrates your aging experience?)
7. Are you familiar with the term “aging well/successful aging?” What does aging well/successful aging mean to you? Would you consider yourself someone who is successfully aging? Why or why not?
8. What are some of the stereotypes of aging/being “old?”
9. Can you tell me about an experience in which you encountered stereotypes and/or ageism?
(Probe: Have they negatively affected you? What has this done for your mental health and well-being? Have you been able to overcome these attitudes? What sorts of strategies have you used to do so? Do you think these attitudes can be eliminated with the increase of master athletes?)
10. Is there anything that has not been discussed with the experiences of being a Masters swimmer/athlete and aging that has not been discussed that you would like to share?
11. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C

Letter of recruitment



4401 University Drive
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada
T1K 3M4

Phone 403.329.2699
Fax 403.329.2668

<http://www.uleth.ca/hlsc>

November 1, 2016

Dear Potential Research Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study, exploring Masters athlete swimmers 60+ perspectives on aging and health.

This research will require approximately 60 – 90 minutes of your time. During this time, you will be interviewed about opinions of, and experiences with participating in Masters swimming. The interview will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon location and will be audio-recorded.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. I believe you may find the interview to be very enjoyable and rewarding, as it is a way for you to speak your mind about a number of important issues related to aging and health. By participating in this research, you may also benefit others by helping us to better understand what older adults perceive to be the challenges related to physical activity and sport participation and how we may work to improve the health of older adults.

Several steps will be conducted to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interview will be audio-recorded, this recording will be destroyed after a two-year retention period. In the meantime, the recordings will be kept on a password protected computer that only myself and my research supervisor will have access to. The transcript of the interview will NOT contain your name and any identifying information will be removed. I may use direct quotations, however a pseudonym will only be attached to any quotations that I may use. I will also give you the opportunity to review the materials that will be used prior to its release to the public. The information given will be kept for a period of two years and then will be confidentially destroyed.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may decide to withdraw at any time for any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all materials related to the interview will be confidentially destroyed without being used.

The results from this interview will be written up in a thesis, as part of my Masters of Science Health Sciences Program. The results may also be presented in writing in journals read by researchers, to help them better understand the health and physical activity participation of Masters athlete swimmers, in person to academic audiences, or discussed in a media interview. At no time, however, will your name be used as we will assign fake names to all participants and also avoid using any identifying information. If you wish to receive a copy of my written thesis and/or have any further questions regarding this project, you may contact me at chloe.mcnamee@uleth.ca

If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge at 403-329-2747 or research.services@uleth.ca.

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on Masters athlete swimmers' perspectives on aging and health and was given the opportunity to ask questions. I hereby consent to participate in this study. A copy of the consent form has been given to me as a reference for this study.

_____ (Initial) I wish to review the material prior to its release to the public.

_____ (Printed Name of Participant)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

_____ (Printed Name of Researcher)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

WHO: MASTERS SWIMMERS AGE 60+
(MALE OR FEMALE)

WHAT: RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING MASTER'S ATHLETE
SWIMMERS PERSPECTIVES ON AGING AND HEALTH

WHERE: IN A CONVENIENT LOCATION OF YOU
CHOOSING (ON CAMPUS, IN YOUR HOME, OR
ELSEWHERE).

TIME COMMITMENT: 60 – 90 MINUTE INTERVIEW SCHEDULED
AT
YOUR CONVENIENCE

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

CONTRIBUTING TO HOW WE UNDERSTAND HEALTH IN
OLDER ADULTHOOD AND COMPETITIVE SPORT'S
CONTRIBUTION TO HEALTH

PARTICIPATION IS CONFIDENTIAL

TO PARTICIPATE OR TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:

Chloe McNamee, Graduate Student
Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Lethbridge
Phone: 403-849-1535
Email: chloe.mcnamee@uleth.ca



Appendix E

Participant Interest Letter

Hello,

I am a graduate student at the University of Lethbridge in the Masters of Science, Health Sciences program. I am currently designing a study which will investigate the experiences of male and female Master athlete swimmers, 60 years and older, and their perspectives on aging and health. I have received approval from my supervisory committee to begin my study and from the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee to officially recruit participants. I am inquiring whether members of your swim club may be interested in my upcoming study. This research will require approximately 60 – 90 minutes of your time. During this time, you will be interviewed about opinions of, and experiences with participating in Masters swimming. This will be a confidential interview and will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon location and will be audio-recorded.

Several steps will be conducted to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interview will be audio-recorded, this recording will be destroyed after a two-year retention period. In the meantime, the recordings will be kept on a password protected computer that only myself and my research supervisor will have access to. The transcript of the interview will NOT contain your name and any identifying information will be removed. I may use direct quotations, however a pseudonym will only be attached to any quotations that I may use. I will also give you the opportunity to review the materials that will be used prior to its release to the public. The information given will be kept for a period of two years and then will be confidentially destroyed.

Are you (or another member of your club) willing to pass this information along to potentially interested members? If you are interested in participating or for more information, please contact me via the email address or phone number listed above. I am hopeful my proposed study will contribute to how we understand health in older adulthood and competitive sport's contribution to health. Thank you for your time and I hope I will be in contact with your swim club soon.

Sincerely,

Chloe McNamee

Appendix F

Field Notes for Bennett

Before interview:

Bennett and I discussed that it would be optimal to meet at the sports facility his swim team practices at. I arrived with plenty of time and took a bit of a walk around to see the facility. The pool is beautiful, with three sections – an area with shallow water, the Olympic size pool, and an area for diving. There is a running track as you first walk in. Good Earth Coffee and a Jugo Juice, with areas to sit are in the front entrance – Jugo Juice being an appropriate choice of “fast food” as it tends to provide healthier food choices. There were many people with duffel bags – enjoying the newspaper or conversation, or having working meetings. Seems to be quite an inviting environment and people come to enjoy themselves here.

After interview:

Bennett arrived at Good Earth Coffee Kiosk where we were supposed to meet – we proceeded through a corridor to where it was a quieter environment. He began the conversation speaking about what it is like to be a Masters athlete and how the swim club has positively influenced his life, directly on track of what my interview questions were about. I then proceeded to show him the letter of consent and began recording. The whole interview I couldn't help but feel intrigued and inspired – he gave such in-depth answers to my questions. I felt myself being so engaged throughout the entire interview, as he gave examples of stories and perspectives that I had not considered prior to the interview. What I mean by that is how he described going through a disease like cancer and how sport and the support from his swim team encouraged him to persevere through the negative experience of a disease. His responses and stories towards Masters swimming were such an amazing example of what I am looking for in my study. He already is leaving me analyzing the interview. Many quotes I will use from him and his perspectives on sport, aging, and health. “I leave it all in the pool,” nothing defeats him (i.e., cancer, arthritis, osteoporosis), he takes it all and sees what happens. He does all that he can. Age does not defy him. It is important to reflect on these initial stories and experiences as I move through the rest of my interviews, to further explore the aging beliefs behind these Masters swimmers.

Field Notes for Baileigh

Before interview:

Baileigh and I discussed to have the interview at her home. I arrived at her house in a really nice area of Calgary. Once I saw the house, I initially felt influenced with a pre-judgment around this population being a group of “well-off” individuals, if this is how her house looks like. Her house was well kept and was nicely decorated in Christmas decorations and lights. As I head into this interview, I am feeling inspired to explore this conversation and to meet this new participant, with new perspectives and experiences. I feel a sense of confidence in the set of interview questions I have prepared for our conversation. I am interested in learning about a female’s story and how this compares and differs to the previous male perspective I have received.

After interview:

After this interview, I recognized how interviews will differ from one another. Some participant’s will hear the interview question and understand the concepts you are trying to understand, and others will need a push to dig deeper in their story. This interview was a bit challenging, as many of my questions did not elicit in-depth conversation with Baileigh. There were many probes that I utilized to further elicit the conversation. This was not to suggest that what she had to say was not valuable or that she did not share her experiences. I did run through my structured interview questions quite quickly. This just meant that I needed to take a different approach to her interview than others. I was able to initiate conversation about other topics that she seemed to show passion for (i.e., the social aspect of the club, her competition experiences, how they set up the lanes, finances, sponsorship, and how she can never imagine not swimming). This helped to grasp more of a sense of comfort when it did not feel so formal, which was a great learning experience for me when going through a semi-structured interview process. The end of the interview ended with her excitement towards what this study will help to understand, and where it will lead. Through Baileigh’s interview I was able to recognize that her experiences as a Masters swimmer throughout her aging process have reflected on a sense of enjoyment from the social atmosphere and the competitive environment she gravitates to. These perspectives were important patterns to initially note while moving through the rest of my interviews.

Final Field Note

As I have completed a round of ten interviews with Masters swimmers, who fit my inclusion criteria of my study, I feel it is important to reflect upon this experience. These ten swimmers included 8 women and 2 men, each were employed or retired, all from the Calgary or Edmonton area. Deciding on an interview setting with each participant was never a difficulty, nor having participants cancel or not show up. I was greeted with a warm welcome and sense of interest from each participant, as they were thrilled to be a part of my study. My prepared semi-structured interview questions were understood and invited insightful conversation from each participant. I did discover difficulty from a few participants when I asked if they had an example that illustrated their aging experience. There was clarification needed by many of the participants of what I meant when I used the word “illustrate.” I then decided not to continue using this probe once I had a few participants not understand what was being asked. The process of each interview flowed very well. I had two instances where surrounding noise affected my hearing of the participant; the rest of the interviews took place in either a quiet area of the sports facility or in the participant’s home. After each interview, the participant and I would continue with conversation about the study, many were interested in what the aim of my research was and how this population inspired me. I valued the conversations I had with each participant, there were many similarities among them but there were differences to note. Exploring ten Masters swimmers stories can introduce the challenge of keeping each participant straight, however I am confident that because I collected my own data and noting any insights into a set of field notes I was able to keep each story true to the participant. As I continue with my analysis process and transcribe my interviews, I will further gain a sense of closeness to my data and the stories of my participants. The common narratives among my participants were surrounding the social aspect of Masters swim clubs, the motivation behind their participation, and general exaggerated but undesired attitude of aging. The stories reflected on how swimming in particular from any other sport has helped to encourage a healthier lifestyle and aging process. Meaning that swimmers who experienced symptoms of arthritis, swimming was extremely important for the maintenance of the disease. The swimmers valued the outcomes they received from their participation, which also encouraged an active lifestyle further into their aging life. I was able to notice their passion for being physically active and how important this has been for their lives. Noting the common stories around the social aspects of the club and the swim environment that these participants value, I was also able to explore aspects of a sports club that I may not have considered previously. This was around the financial aspect of being a member in a club and the financial demands in doing so. As well, the commonality of the swimmers being a higher educated group, with few members not having any post-secondary education. These were interesting aspects for me to explore through their stories, which deserves further research. My reflection of this group was further recognized as I felt a sense of inspiration after talking with the participants, their stories as to why sport participation is a valued aspect their lives influenced an understanding towards this passion. The stories of each of these participants greatly satisfy my research purpose and I am anxious to further understand their perspectives and beliefs of my topic.

Appendix H

Searching for Themes

1. *“Feel Best After a Swim”*

- Confidence (sport and self-confidence)
- Discipline
- Energy (to get energy you have to expend it) (exertion and enjoyment)
- Don't leave anything in the pool
- Involvement
- Lifestyle (way of life)
- Listen to your body (modify swimming)
- Stress reliever
- Increasing participation
- Listen to you body
- Feeling of the water
- Feel better
- Endorphin rush
- Satisfaction
- Self-alliance
- Feel energized after a swim
- Improving as a swimmer
- Lifelong exercise
- Reasons to swim
- Facing adversities
- Expenditure
- Continuing sport involvement
- Activity appropriate to how you feel
- Dichotomy of swimming
- Feeling of invigoration
- Inspiring
- Modify swimming
- Rest rather than injury
- Physical courage
- Runners gravitate to swimming
- Slow down doesn't mean quit
- The love of swimming
- Ergonomics of swimming

2. *“Changing The Ethos”*

- Socially health, physically healthy
- Socially unique
- Camaraderie and coaching
- Commitment

- Swim then socialize
- The socialization keeps me with the group, the love of the sport keeps me in the water
- Social club with a swimming problem
- Education
- Identifying as a socially unique group
- Social circle
- Social club
- Positive impact
- Support
- Harder to train alone
- Coaching
- Boring to swim alone
- Gravitate to coached sports
- Sport culture
- Commonality of swimming
- Connecting with people
- Recognition as Masters swimmer
- Sense of camaraderie, friendship, commonality
- Financial circumstance
- Masters club involvement
- Swimming family
- Team accomplishment
- Standard has been set for the swim club
- Unconditional love
- Unexpected rewards/benefits
- What prompts participation
- Wide variety of swim members
- Can't imagine not doing it
- Club is part of who I am
- Few member turnover
- Family history
- Grew up around water
- Something that stretches, challenges me, takes me to another level

3. "Frames the Mind"

- Mental and physiological needs
- Mental fitness
- Swimming memory

4. "The Swimmer Profile"

- Identify as a swimmer
- The way you move

- Lifetime athlete
- Preferred sport
- Role of swimming over time
- Swim ability
- To be active rather than athlete
- Transition
- Influence to sense of identity
- Defining yourself as a swimmer
- Swim ability
- Long-term swimmer
- Considering an athlete
- Competitive club environment
- Competitive nature
- The way you move
- Healthier body stature and movement
- Athletic lifestyle
- Motivation
- My shoulders are for swimming
- Swim 100 laps when 100

5. “Support and Motivation”

- Cheer you on
- Family support
- Motivation among swimmers friends, younger people
- Parental influence
- Support to swim
- Finances (demands/limitations) (Socioeconomic status and subsidy)
- Parent-child swimmers
- Husband and wife duos
- Sibling competition
- Active personal life
- Active career
- Work influences to swim

6. “Swimming Keeps Me Healthy”

- Good for your health
- Health and activity (to be active and healthy)
- Health decline when not swimming
- Healthier than the non-active
- Healthy lifestyle choices
- Therapeutic swimming
- Chronic disease and physical activity
- Health issues results in a downhill spiral
- Healthcare system

- Research proving benefits of physical activity
- Tertiary preventions

7. “Competition”

- Competition not a motivator
- Competitive nature
- Non-competitive member
- Swim your seeded time
- Competition as Masters athlete
- Defining yourself as a swimmer
- Goal to work toward
- Encouragement
- Triathlete members
- Competition not why I do this
- Competitive until injury
- Elite athlete
- Traveling to swim meets

8. “Fighting the Stereotype”

- Redefining aging
- Eliminating ageist attitudes/sense of worry
- In tune with society
- Intimidation (of athleticism)
- Decades difference of aging
- Cultural difference of aging
- Swimming with all ages
- Relatable
- Dismantling stereotypes
- Stereotyped sports
- Stereotypes eliminated in competition
- Stereotypes of aging
- Changing society
- Swimming workouts with all age ranges
- Intimidation

9. “Active Lifestyle”

- Active career life/work influences to swim
- Active (family, group, siblings)

10. “Swimming Helps Arthritic Pain”

- Swimming reducing injury
- Chronic disease and physical activity
- Experience of pain to succeed
- Cardiorespiratory fitness

- Ease on joints
- Impact of arthritis
- Swimming and injury
- Swimming eases bone impact
- Switched to swimming from injury
- Fortunate for health

11. “Life Organized Around Swimming”

- Adjusting/fit schedule to swim
- Practices on a regular basis
- Never miss a swim
- Habit – part of the routine
- High priority
- I’m not happy unless I can swim
- Important element of life
- Finding pool time might not be easy
- Fit schedule to swim
- Flexibility
- Initially fit hand and glove
- Consistent role over time
- Continuing activity through adulthood
- Core of my life
- Hard to give up
- Keeping fit is a way of life
- Keeps me there
- Physical activity schedule
- Planned vacations and physical activity
- Top priority

12. “Independence”

- Quality of life

13. “Isolation”

- Physical activity isolation
- Motivating the sick/lazy/non-athletic
- Judgment
- Barriers
- Comparison to general population
- Non-active questioning participation
- Over-medicated

14. “Swimming Helps the Aging Process”

- Philosophy and aging
- Aging and function

- Aging as an ally
- Aging experience
- Aches, pains, and aging
- Difficulty to aging
- Every age frames its different joys and pleasures
- Functional/dysfunctional aging
- Attitudes
- Acceptance
- Awareness
- Challenge of the changing body
- Masters members as a different aging group
- Not letting aging define you
- Maintaining health and fitness
- Successful aging
- Vanity
- Cognitively aware
- Mental and physical aging
- Perceptions and experiences
- Aging process
- Positive behaviours
- Positive influence
- Knowledge to age
- Time
- Unpredictable
- Aging is change speeded up
- Aging parameters
- Being present
- Gratitude to experience
- Living longer and healthier than our parents
- Muscle degeneration
- Perceptions of old
- Planning aging

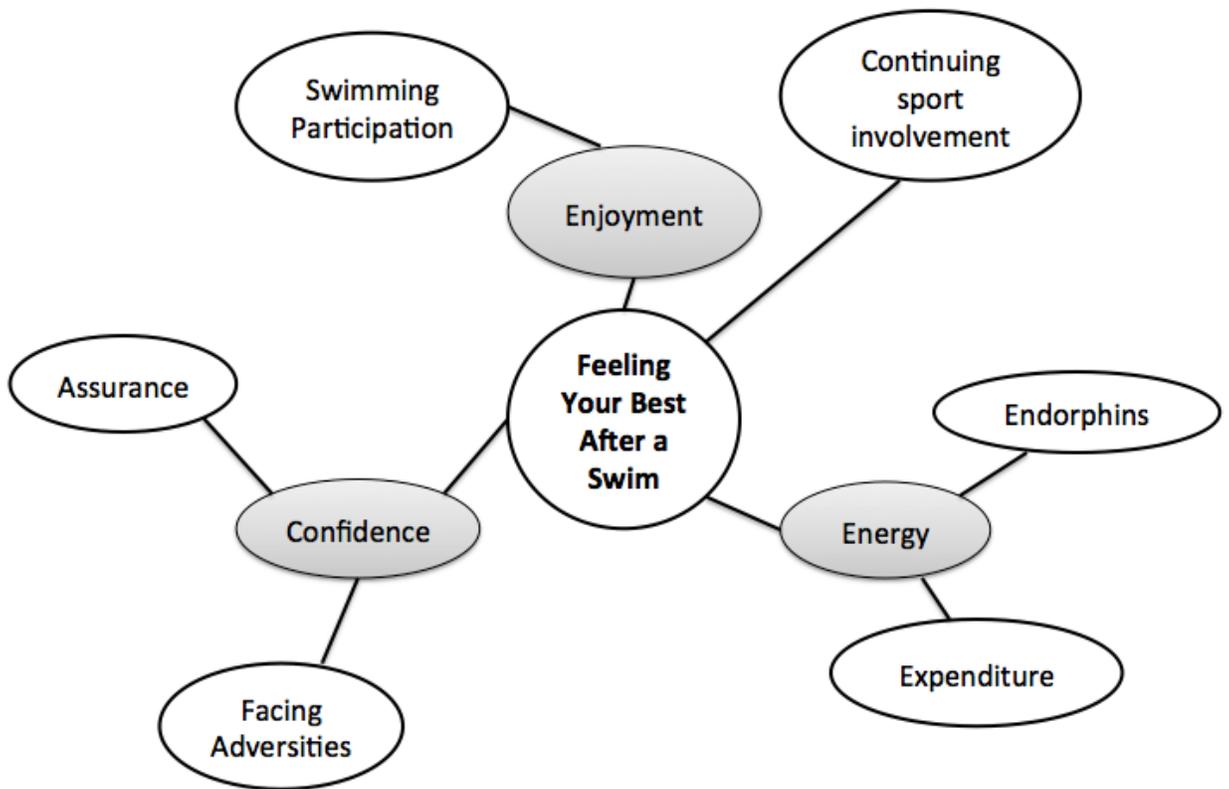
Collapsing Themes

1. - *“Feeling Your Best After A Swim”*
2. - *“The Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs”*
3. 6. 10. - *“The Swimmer Profile”*
4. 7. - *“Support and Motivation”*
5. 9. 12. - *“Swimming Keeps Me Healthy”*
8. 11. 13. 14. - *“Swimming Enhances The Aging Process”*

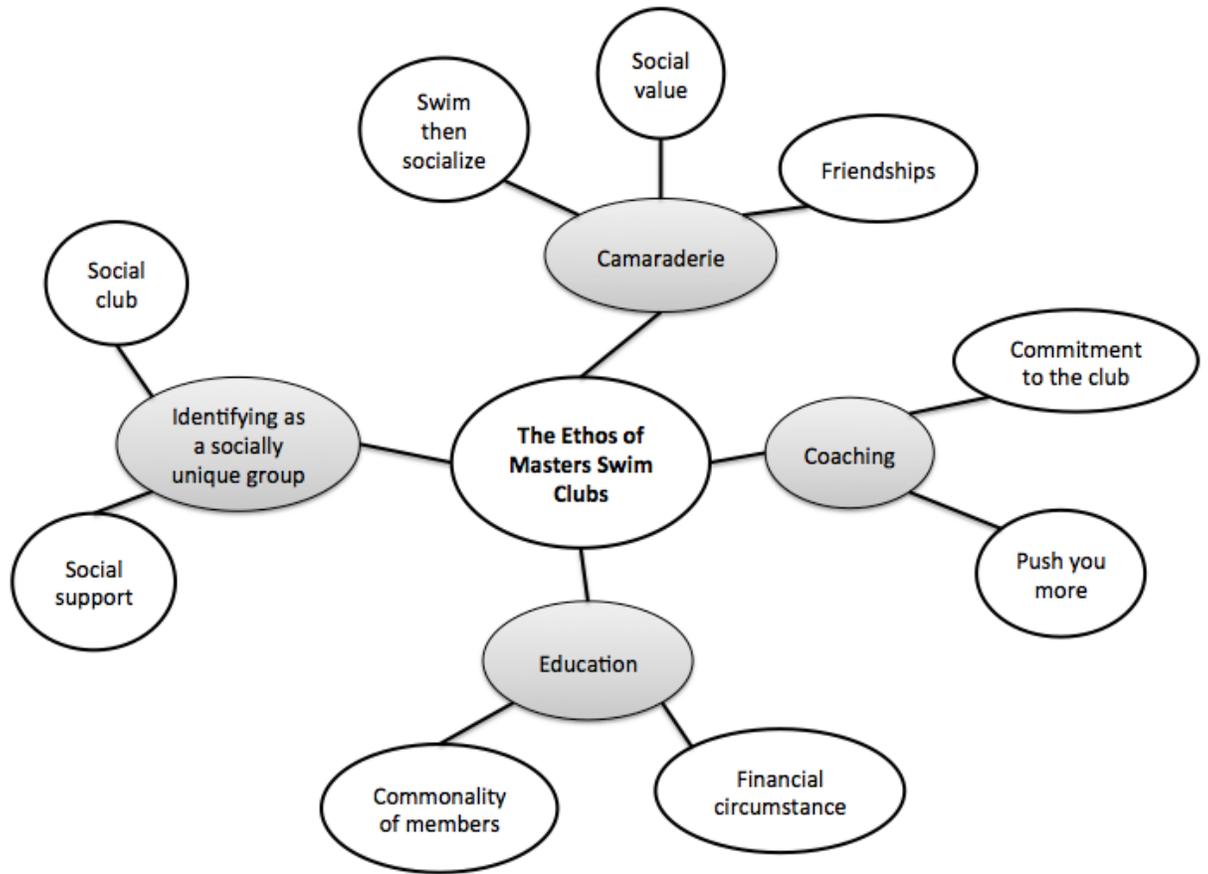
Appendix I

Thematic Maps

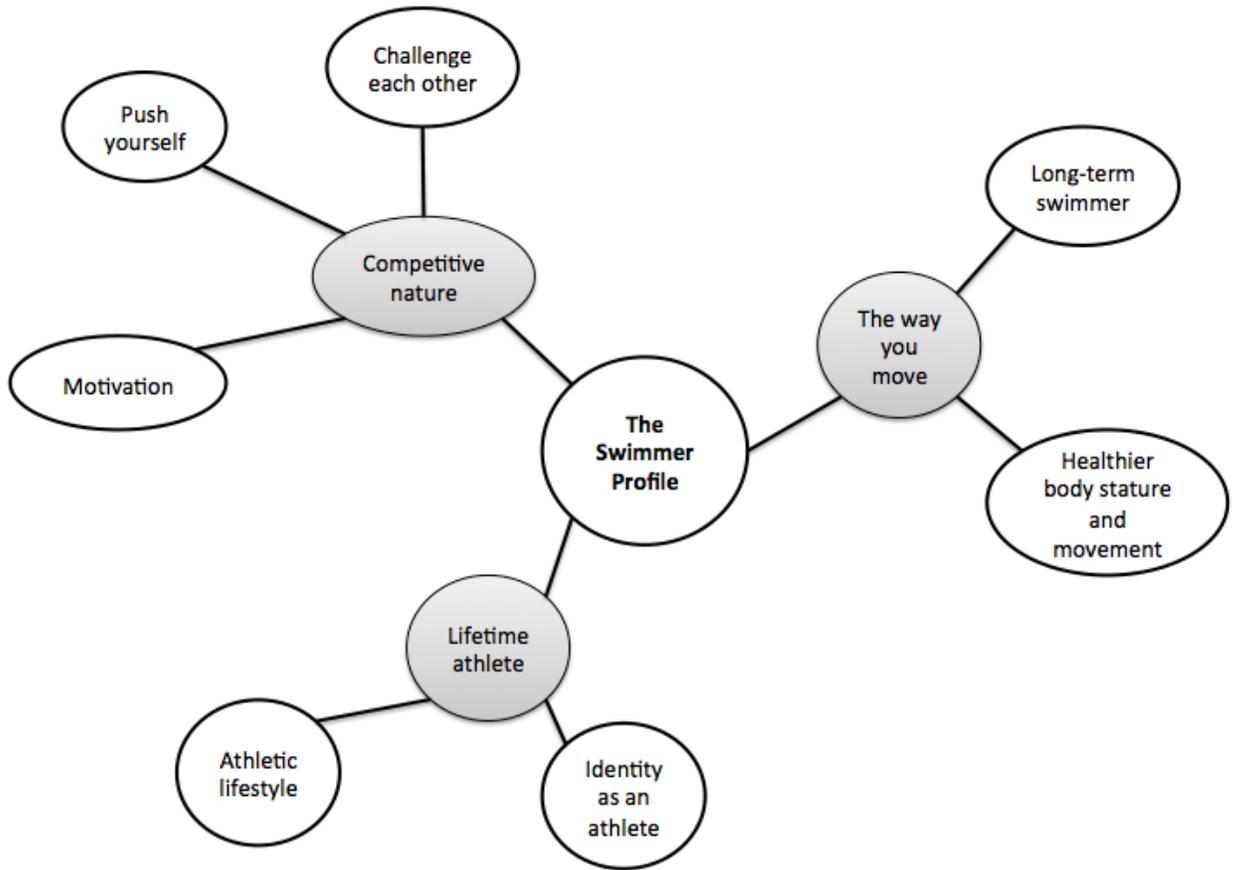
Feeling Your Best After A Swim – Thematic Map



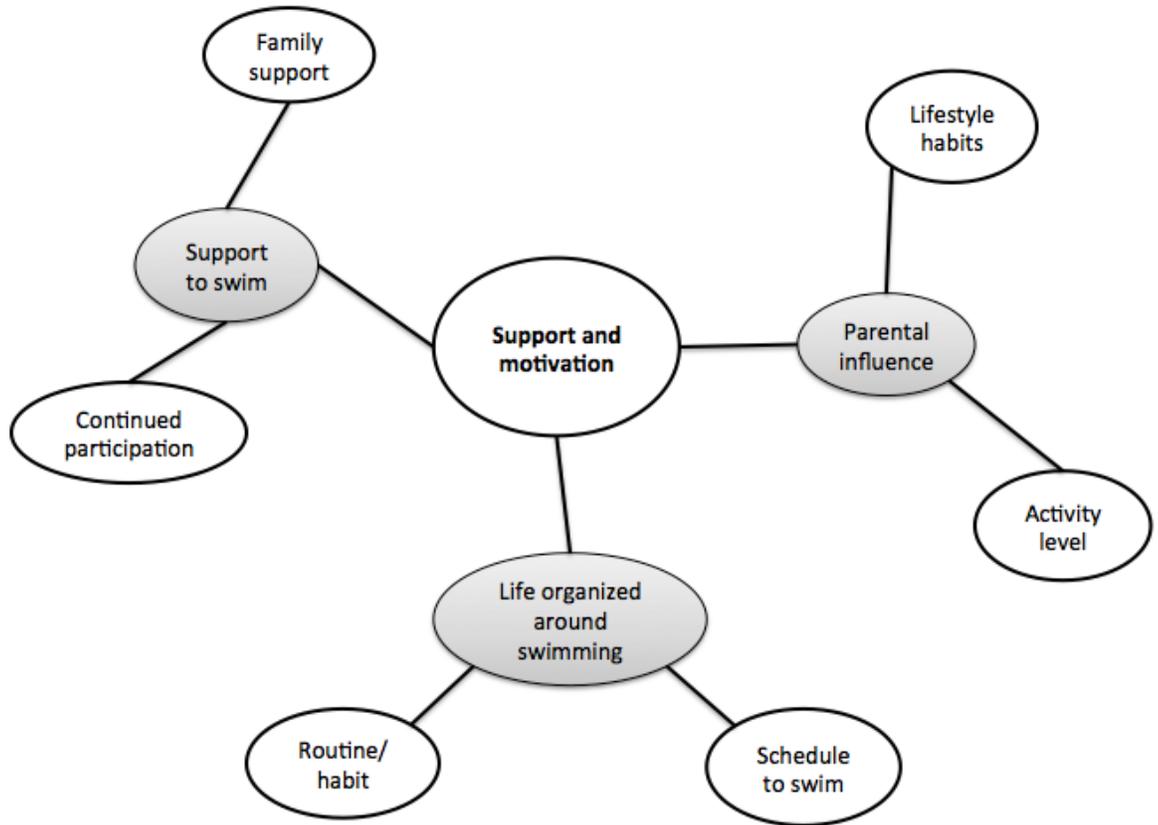
The Ethos of Masters Swim Clubs – Thematic Map



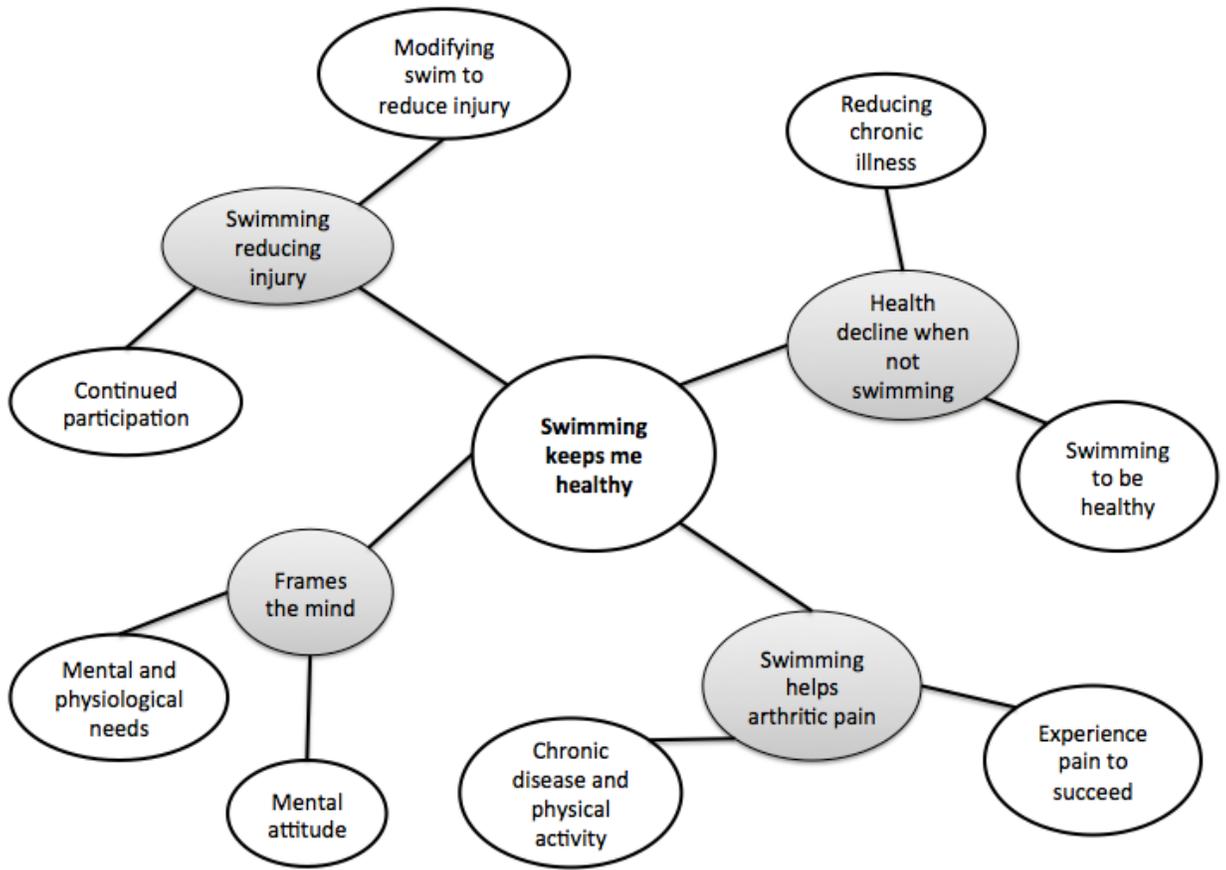
The Swimmer Profile – Thematic Map



Support and Motivation – Thematic Map



Swimming Keeps Me Healthy – Thematic Map



Swimming Helps The Aging Process – Thematic Map

