In it for the Long Run: An Ethnography of Psychological and Social Benefits of Distance Running

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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Abstract

Recreational running is an activity increasing in popularity (Running USA, 2012). The current study sought to gain an ‘insiders’ perspective into the ‘lived experiences’ and social world of distance running so to explore the meaning, value and significance of the activity to the lives of ‘highly committed’ runners in Toronto (Canada). Ethnography of running club participants was used to inform the research. Findings suggest that commitment to distance running was effective for fulfilling a number of human ‘needs’, including for health, fitness, acceptance, belonging, self-esteem, autonomy, competence, relatedness and perhaps self-actualization as proposed by Maslow (1954) and Deci and Ryan (2000). Running was further conceptualized as a “serious leisure” (Stebbins, 1982) which helps explain the process of adaptively incorporating physical activity into one’s life and committing long-term. This research highlights some oft ignored psychological and social benefits of physical activity adherence which may contribute to improved overall health and well-being.

Keywords: ethnography, physical culture, health, human needs, self-actualization, self-determination, serious leisure
Acknowledgements

Since the time I began the endeavour of pursuing this degree, back in September of 2009, I have raced two full marathons, dozens of shorter events and have run hundreds and thousands of kilometres in training and preparation. In that time, I have learned much about myself, my peers and the sport itself and yet none of that compares to the marathon-like challenge that has been the writing of this thesis.

There are many people whom have made this possible and I feel a great need to thank each and every one of them for their unique and special contributions.

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Chapter 1: Personal Reflection

“Out on the roads there is fitness and self-discovery and the persons we were destined to be.” – Dr. George Sheehan

In order to contextualize and establish my own interest in running and the research itself, it is important to share some relevant ‘accountable knowledge’ (Stanley, 1992) and personal perspectives. I am a 25 year old male recreational long-distance runner who has been committed to training and competing 'seriously' for the past three years. This has often required running six or seven days a week, sometimes more than once a day and more than 100km most weeks. I participate in more than a dozen road races each year which range in distance from a mile (1609m) on the track to the marathon (42.2km) on the roads. In September 2010, after approximately two years of running on my own, I decided to join a local running club with the intention of improving my running performance as well as keeping me motivated through the coming winter months. The club I chose was centrally located in Toronto (Canada), was approximately 30 years old with over 150 members who ranged in age, ability and experience, and was open for anyone to join (for a nominal fee).

I began running with the club once a week, then two and later three times during their weekly scheduled club runs. I sought support and advice about running from the club coaches and those most experienced and was gradually integrated into a small group of runners of similar talent and ability. I began training more specifically for particular events, including the half and full marathon which meant my commitment and dedication to running continued to increase. As my results improved, my fitness
increased and my friendships with training partners, coaches and other club members
developed; I became more and more involved with the club and integrated and invested
in the club environment. Running with the club each week and with my training partners
and friends had become an established part of my routine and a valued part of my
lifestyle. Running ceased to be for and by myself, but became about the club and group
dynamic. It became a priority that I began to schedule my life around and from which I
was being rewarded in numerous ways. I was both contributing to as well as benefitting
from the club environment which became about so much more than just running; it
became an important part of my life and part of who I was.

At the same time, I was pursuing a graduate degree from the University of
Toronto in the Department of Exercise Sciences. My academic background had been in
Medical Sciences including physiology, cell biology and biochemistry and yet my budding
personal and academic interests were in the applied field of Exercise Sciences and the
sociology and psychology of exercise and physical activity behaviours. Given my
successful integration and acceptance into the physical (sub)culture of distance running,
which included a corresponding increase in both quality and quantity of my enjoyment
of physical activity adherence, I became increasingly interested in the running club
subculture as an area of academic research and the dedicated participants who took
part. Specifically, I was curious to explore how individuals come to belong and integrate
into such physical cultures, the reasons they choose to do so, as well as the rewards,
benefits and outcomes that individuals personally and collectively ascribed to such
membership and adherence.
Chapter 2: Introduction

The present study has origins in September 2010, when the researcher joined a local running club for a weekly group workout. This would begin an approximately 12 month ethnography exploring the social world of distance running (sub)culture, specifically a road running club, and all the related activities and opportunities this membership would entail. Of greatest relevance was the level of commitment and dedication that many admittedly recreational (amateur) yet highly adherent distance runners showed toward their physical activity (running) behaviours. They were ‘serious’ runners in every sense of the word who worked purposefully and diligently to train and perform at the best of their abilities and strived for personal improvement and success. Running was indeed not only an important part of their lives, but an entire way of life. It thus seemed worthwhile to further explore this complicated yet highly rewarding and healthy way of life.

Physical activity, the everyday movements of the body, is an important determinant of health and is positively correlated with physical health and fitness. Exercise is defined as “any planned, purposeful, structured and repetitive engagement of physical activity with the aim of improving or maintaining physical fitness” which encompasses a number of components such as body composition, cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength and endurance (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985: 128). Finally, sport may be loosely defined as any competitive and organized form of physical activity that involves various rules and regulations. In our current climate of increasing sedentary behaviour, rates of obesity and diseases of affluence, there is
growing interest and attention for the promotion and implementation of healthy lifestyles, of which physical activity, exercise, and sport are key components. Indeed, there is now a salience placed on our individual and collective need to be physically active to attain and maintain fitness for overall health and well-being which incorporates not only physical, but also psychological and social aspects.

Growing evidence supports that routine physical activity, including exercise and sport, provide substantial physical, psychological and social health benefits that may improve the quality and quantity of one's life (Lox, Martin Ginis, & Petruzzello, 2006). Such benefits include improved cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular, and metabolic functioning (Warburton, Whitney Nicol & Bredin, 2006); enhanced self-confidence and-esteem; and overall greater self-worth and -efficacy (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001).

Furthermore, Warburton, Charlesworth, Ivey, Nettlefold and Bredin (2010) concluded that "there is incontrovertible evidence that regular exercise is an effective preventative strategy against premature mortality, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, colon cancer, breast cancer, and type 2 diabetes" (p. 212). This applies to most individuals regardless of age, gender, or race. There is also a trend for ‘prescribing’ exercise as a treatment or therapy for a number of medical and psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety (Carron, Hausenblas, & Estabrooks, 2003). Yet despite the proven effectiveness of physical activity to contribute to optimal health, levels of adherence are extremely low. Currently, less than 15% of Canadian adults participate in the recommended levels of weekly physical activity (Colley et al., 2011). A majority of research has explored the complex barriers and obstacles which prevent and limit
individuals, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, from being sufficiently physically active (Sallis & Owen, 1999; Trost, Owen, Bauman, Sallis, & Brown, 2001), while fewer studies have explored the minority of the population who consistently and successfully achieve or exceed the recommended levels of physical activity, who adaptively integrate physical activity, exercise and sport into their lives, and who profit from the physical, psychological and social benefits of physical activity adherence.

The purpose of the present study was thus to explore the meaning, value and significance of physical activity, specifically distance running, to the lives of those highly committed and adherent. Furthermore, it sought to describe and explain both why and how such individuals are able to successfully adopt and maintain their physical activity and the various rewards and benefits that result from this. An understanding and appreciation of physical activity adherence could have important implications for successfully promoting, implementing and participating in such activities which may contribute to overall better health and well-being.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

What follows is the presentation of basic concepts and ideas integral to an understanding of the current study. These include health, the role of physical activity for health, determinants of physical activity behaviours, costs and benefits of physical activity and the psychology of physical activity adherence. Each will be addressed in turn.
3.1 Physical Activity for Health and Well-being

Health is a multidimensional phenomenon. It involves physical, mental and social determinants which all play a unique role in establishing an individual’s well-being (Lox, Martin Ginis, & Petruzzello, 2006). The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1946: 100). The 'Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion' elaborated on the topic and proposed that health is not merely a state of being, but "a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities" (WHO, 1986: 1). How health is defined, how it is measured and what the purpose and outcome of health should be are highly controversial topics. While the precise definition and means of objectively measuring health remain controversial and debated, the important point for consideration is that health is an important, perhaps vital, outcome both for subjective and objective well-being and is worthy of pursuit, attainment and maintenance by all. As will be discussed subsequently, the determinants of health are numerous and complex and include the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and the person’s individual characteristics and behaviours (lifestyle).

Physical activity, and the closely related yet distinct concepts of, exercise and sport are known to play a role in determining health as part of one’s individual lifestyle. Physical activity has been defined very simply as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles and that results in energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell, &
Christenson, 1985). While every individual must perform some level of physical activity in order to sustain life, the quantity and quality of physical activity is largely subject to personal choice and varies considerably between people and may change over time. Exercise is defined as any planned, purposeful, structured and repetitive engagement of physical activity with the objective aim of improving or maintaining physical fitness which encompasses a number of components such as body composition, cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, endurance and flexibility (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985). It is positively correlated with increased physical health and fitness. Finally, sport shall be conceptualized as "all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels." (Council of Europe, 2001). The key components of this definition of sport include that it is organized, regulated by specific rules and contains an aspect of competition.

Physical activity, exercise and sport participation have and continue to be promoted, recommended, and prescribed as safe, fun, and effective ways to increase one’s overall health and well-being. Exercise, physical activity and sport can provide substantial physical, psychological and social health benefits that may improve the quality and quantity of one's life (Penedo & Dahn, 2005). While exercise is mainly responsible for determining physical health and fitness, it is also known to exert mental and social effects such as improved mood and decreased anxiety, increased social interactions and opportunities, and greater self-efficacy and esteem (Penado & Dahn 2005; Scully, Kremer & Meade, 1998). Yates (1991) noted that exercise provides an
excellent adaptation mechanism and seems to help individuals maintain homeostasis, self-regulate and stabilize affect, and provide an ongoing sense of self-improvement and enhanced sense of self.

3.2 Recommended Guidelines

Government and health organizations make specific physical activity recommendations for various populations in order to promote the achievement of health and fitness. Currently, Health Canada (via the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology and ParticipACTION) recommends that adults accumulate 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous levels of physical activity per week, and yet the majority of Canadians are sedentary or do not meet the intended levels of activity leading to poor health (Colley et al., 2011). In our current climate of increasing sedentary behaviour and rates of the so-called diseases of affluence (i.e. obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers) there is a growing public health movement for promoting healthy lifestyles, of which physical activity and exercise are key components. Indeed, there is now a high salience placed on the need to be physically active and to attain and maintain physical health and fitness. While only about 15% of Canadian adults meet the Health Canada recommended levels of weekly physical activity (Colley et al., 2011), this small but devoted group of individuals may have important and valuable insight as to the reasons, motivations and values that drive their exercise adherence and may offer insightful ways in which to increase exercise behaviours more generally. There is currently no defined or specified safe upper limit for recommended physical activity.
Rather, Canadians are advised as to the minimum amount and told that "more daily physical activity provides greater health benefits" (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2011) Given that so few Canadians routinely engage in physical activity, there are likely a number of reasons for this and exploring the determinants of physical activity behaviours is an area of active research.

3.3 Determinants of Physical Activity and Exercise Behaviour

A recent review by Trost, Owen, Bauman, Sallis and Brown (2002) summarized the relevant research pertaining to the personal, social, and environmental factors associated with physical activity in adults. This systematic review was an update to a review by Sallis and Owen (1999) and added 38 new studies published between 1998 and 2000. The authors chose to examine six classes of physical activity “determinants” including demographic and biological factors, psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors, behavioural attributes and skills, social and cultural factors, physical environmental factors, and finally, physical activity characteristics.

Individual-level variables such as socioeconomic status and perceived self-efficacy consistently demonstrated the strongest associations with physical activity behaviour, whereas relatively few consistent positive or negative associations were found with respect to variables classified as behavioural attributes and skills, sociocultural influences, or physical environmental influences. In terms of demographic and biological factors, age and gender are consistently correlated to physical activity behaviour in that males engage in higher levels of physical activity which is inversely
correlated with age. Socioeconomic status, occupational status, and educational attainment were also consistent determinants of physical activity behaviour. Being overweight or obese was negatively associated with physical activity as was being an ethnicity other than Caucasian. Of the psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors explored, self-efficacy emerged as the most consistent predictor of physical activity behaviours. Lack of time, barriers to exercise, mood disturbance and poor body image were negatively associated with physical activity while enjoyment of exercise, control, expectations of benefits, the intention to exercise, personality variables and self-motivation were positively associated. For behavioural attributes and skills, an activity history during adulthood, dietary habits, past exercise program, and processes of change were all positively correlated with physical activity behaviours. Smoking was the only variable which was associated negatively. Of the social and cultural factors explored, physician influence as well as social support from friends, peers, spouse and family were all positively associated with physical activity while social isolation was negative. Numerous physical environmental factors were included in the review and only climate/season and urban location were negatively correlated whereas both actual and perceived access to facilities, enjoyable scenery, observing others exercise, home equipment, hilly terrain and neighbourhood safety were all positively associated with physical activity behaviours. Finally, in terms of physical activity characteristics, both intensity and perceived effort were correlated negatively with exercise behaviours.

The review concludes by mentioning that the literature on this subject is predominantly based on cross-sectional studies, thus preventing the ability to infer
causal relationships. Future longitudinal and intervention studies are deemed necessary as are more qualitative inquiries incorporating firsthand experience from those who both do and do not engage in routine physical activity. Research investigating the real and perceived barriers to physical activity make up a majority of the current literature, while studies exploring the facilitators, moderators and mediators of successful physical activity adherence are less abundant. It is thus imperative that future research seek to explore, understand and apply ways in which committed and adherent physical activity participants adopt, integrate and maintain their behaviours as well as the associated cognitive and emotional processes which contribute to prolonged participation.

3.4 Commitment to Physical Activity as Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a recent branch of psychology whose purpose was summarized by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2000): "We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise, which achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities" (p. 13). It is concerned primarily with four topics or areas of research including: (1) positive experiences, (2) enduring psychological traits, (3) positive relationships and (4) positive institutions. Moreover, it seeks to explore and analyze states or conditions which create pleasure, happiness or 'flow,' as well as values, strengths, virtues and talents which contribute to individual and collective well-being (Peterson, 2009). Although it is not intended to undermine the importance of studying how things go wrong (as in physical disease and mental illness, social oppression, and
inequality), it emphasizes the importance of understanding the conditions in which things go right/well, such as optimal health (and fitness), sporting success and financial fortune. Such an understanding will have important implications for guiding and applying common cognitive, emotional and behavioural strategies which can optimize the likelihood of a positive outcome.

A commitment to physical activity, exercise and sport is one such example of an area which may yield important contributions to better describing, explaining and predicting an adherence to ‘healthy’ lifestyles involving physical activity, exercise and sport. A commitment to physical activity can be considered a reflection of how dedicated or devoted a person is to her/his physical activity behaviours by oneself and others. It is a measure of the strength of adherence to an adopted physical activity program. For the committed exerciser, satisfaction, enjoyment, and achievement derived from exercise are incentives that motivate the continuity of the behaviour (Chapman & De Castro, 1990). Sachs (1981) viewed commitment to exercise as a result of the rewards gained from exercise, including social relationships, health benefits, status, prestige, or monetary advantages. Committed exercisers, in light of Sachs’ (1981) description (a) often exercise for extrinsic rewards, (b) view their exercise as an important, but not central, part of their lives, and (c) may not suffer severe withdrawal symptoms when they cannot exercise for some reason. The committed exerciser controls her/his physical activity and considers it to be an important and valuable part of their overall lifestyle. As with other behaviours, moderation is important and finding an ideal quantity of physical activity is unique to the individual. Overdoing the adopted
physical activity can lead to both injuries, burnout and to the neglect of other important responsibilities in life (Szabo, 2000). For long-term adherence and enjoyment, it is imperative that individuals find a balance between the costs and benefits of physical activity participation. By exploring the individuals and groups who belong to and participate in physical (sub)cultures, a greater understanding of the facilitators, mediators and moderators of physical activity behaviour may be gained.

3.5 Psychology of Physical Activity and Exercise Behaviours

A number of theories and models have been proposed to explain the motivations of certain individuals and populations to engage in physical activity, exercise and sport behaviours. This short review is not meant to be exhaustive nor considered complete but rather aims to highlight some of the relevant theories and ideas.

In a 1943 paper titled 'A theory of human motivation,' Abraham Maslow proposed that all human beings are driven by a number of innate, basic or 'universal' human 'needs.' Other terms for such needs include wants and desires and for simplicity will be used interchangeably in the present paper. This theory is often portrayed in the form of a hierarchy, usually in the graphical form of a pyramid or triangle with more fundamental or essential needs at the base or bottom. The most basic needs, also called "deficiency or d-needs" include the physiological, safety, belongingness and esteem needs. Maslow suggests that more basic needs must first be satisfied before moving on to the next 'level' of needs. Physiological needs come first and are those vital for human survival and basic functioning including the need for food, water, air, shelter and
clothing. Next are the safety or security needs which include basic health and fitness, personal safety of the body, financial security (employment), and perhaps property and equity. Moving 'up' the pyramid we find the need for love and belonging. This includes the need for social interaction, interpersonal relationships, family and sexual intimacy. The esteem needs make up the next 'level' and include the desire for self-esteem, respect, confidence, achievement and accomplishment, and the respect of and by others. Finally, the highest level of the pyramid is the desire for self-actualization, "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1954: p.92). This need relates to a person's full potential and realizing that potential which can be realized in any number of ways be it to be the best parent, employee, athlete or volunteer. "What a man can be, he must be" (Maslow, 1954: 91). Self-actualization in not simply a ‘state’ or ‘status’ which is either achieved or not; but rather a ‘process’ of constantly striving for self-improvement and a sense of personal accomplishment. It can be pursued specifically in a particular area or activity (i.e. being the best parent, the best employee, the best athlete) as well as more generally in one’s entire life (i.e. being the best person one can be).

A more recent theory of human motivation which has been successfully applied to physical activity behaviours is ‘self-determination theory’ (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation and is concerned with a person’s inherent growth tendencies, their innate psychological needs, and the motivations that lead to making choices that are un-coerced. Ultimately, it interests itself with the degree that an individual's behaviour is self-motivated and self-
determined (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Motivation is proposed to exist on a continuum that involves three forms of internal motivation, four types of external motivation and one level of amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is when a behaviour or activity is initiated for its own sake because it is interesting, pleasurable and satisfying in itself. The three psychological needs that are proposed to be essential for psychological health and well-being and which are said to be universal and innate include competence, autonomy and relatedness.

Competence is the need to be effective and successful and is achieved through the continuous pursuit of excellence and perseverance in an activity or behaviour. This is also referred to as mastery. Autonomy is the need to feel that one is in control of their own actions and behaviours and to be true/integral to oneself. It does not necessarily imply independence of others, but a sense of self-governance and regulation. Autonomy may be established when individuals are self-selecting an activity for which they are not being remunerated or paid. They will often choose an activity for which they have some pre-established interest, a natural ability/talent and/or have achieved moderate successes on which to build upon with increased efforts. They are not bound or obliged to maintain the behaviours and can leave freely at any time. Relatedness has been described as the universal desire to interact, to be connected to, and to experience caring for and by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is the need to relate, share, and interact in one another’s experiences, feelings, attitudes, behaviours and mood states. It shares conceptual similarities with Maslow’s social needs for love, belongingness, acceptance and the respect of and for others.
3.6 Present Purpose and Rationale

Given the role of physical activity, exercise and sport for physical, psychological and social health and well-being, it is clearly important to document, describe and understand those who are highly committed to being physically active as part of a healthy lifestyle. The purpose of the current study was to explore the meaning, value and significance of physical activity to those highly committed, specifically to recreational distance running, as a means to describe and explain both why and how physical activity is adopted and adhered to as part of a healthy lifestyle. The ways in which participants become engaged in a high level of physical activity (initiators), why they chose and continue to adhere, how adherence was maintained in the short and long term (mediators, moderators and facilitators), as well as the subjective costs and rewards of adherence were subsequently explored.

Chapter 4: Methods

Ethnography was chosen as the research methodology in order to gain as complete an understanding of the ‘lived experiences’ of participants as possible. Originally, only participant interviews were to be employed for data collection, but given the continued involvement and participation of the lead investigator in the running club, it seemed natural and logical that all observations, interactions and experiences related to various aspects of the club environment be used to influence the research and provide additional depth and richness that stand alone methods such as interviewing cannot provide. Thus, in addition to the articulated verbal responses, opinions and
thoughts provided by participants, attitudes, values, emotions, behaviours, beliefs, and cognitions were also considered when exploring, describing and understanding the meaning, value and significance of running to participant’s lives. Numerous methods of qualitative data collection were employed and will be subsequently described. They included: observation, field notes, formal and informal interviews, group discussions, email (text) exchange, a detailed research log and a reflexive journal.

4.1 Ethnography as Methodology

Ethnographic approaches claim to represent a uniquely humanistic, interpretive approach, as opposed to supposedly "scientific" and "positivistic" positions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). It rejects the dominant positivist, "scientific" model of research which fails to capture the true nature of social settings. Rather, the aim is to recognize the central importance of human action and meaning in the construction of the social world (Holland, 1985). Given the commitment to understanding human beings in their natural environments, ethnographic research often takes place over long periods of time and in an attempt to capture the meanings people attribute to their actions. "In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 1). Ethnography may hold varying meanings and definitions but has evolved to refer to an
integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and
comparative interpretation of social organization and culture.

Ethnographic work often possesses the following features:

1. The actions and accounts of individuals are studied in everyday contexts, rather than
under conditions created and controlled by the researcher - such as in experimental
setups, laboratories, or in highly structured interviews. Simply put, research is
conducted 'in the field.'

2. Data are collected from a wide range of sources and methods including documentary
evidence of various kinds, participant observation and/or relatively informal
conversations being the most common.

3. Data collection is mostly 'unstructured' in that it does not involve following a fixed
and detailed research design specified at the beginning and the categories/themes used
to interpret what individuals are saying and doing are not built into the data collection
process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires; rather, they are
generated out of the process of data analysis.

4. The focus and attention is often only on a few select cases, usually small-scale, such
as a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.

5. Data analysis involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of
human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and
sometimes also wider, contexts. What are often produced are verbal descriptions,
explanations, and theories. Quantification and statistical analysis play little to no role
whatsoever.
The orientation of the ethnographer is often an exploratory one. The goal is thus to investigate some aspect of the social lives of a population of interest, which may include understanding how these individuals perceive and make sense of the situations and environments they face; how they regard themselves and also one another. The initial interests and questions which motivated the original research may be refined and even transformed over the course of the research which can continue for a considerable length of time. Eventually however the inquiry will become progressively more clearly focused on a specific research question(s) and will then allow the strategic and efficient collection of data relevant to pursue the specific question(s) more effectively.

The role of ethnography is to understand the cultures and sub-cultures of a specific group of interest from the perspective of the group members who provide insight and recognition into their behaviours, values, emotions, and mental and physical states. Ethnography as a methodology employs multiple, predominantly qualitative, methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social world and perceptions of the members of the social group. Lofland (1996) described that ethnography focuses on the organization of social life, whereas Berg (2001) included that cognitive data can be obtained through ethnography. Thus, inquiry about mental states and behaviours in sport could be attempted through ethnography. As Tedlock (2000) boldly contended, “by entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people . . . in their everyday lives, ethnographers can better understand the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of their subjects than they can by using any other approach” (p. 456).
Altogether, ethnography is an amalgam of research activities, mediated through the researcher, culminating in a textual account of the culture of a social group.

It is important to realize the connections among epistemology, methodology, and methods. Researchers’ epistemological beliefs are interconnected with their methodology, which should guide their choice of methods. As Brewer (2000) summarized, methodology encapsulates procedural rules. These rules direct the researcher to the specific methods used in a study, ultimately resulting in new knowledge. Letherby (2003) clearly distinguished among method, methodology, and epistemology. A method is a tool or technique for gathering data whereas methodology provides the framework for analyzing, evaluating, and probing the process of research. Through methodology, researchers may assess why particular methods are used, the value of the method, its impact on participants, and the relationship between the data collecting process and the product of those data. An epistemological approach provides the foundation for methodology. Epistemology is a theory of knowledge, or consideration of what is “legitimate knowledge” (Letherby, 2003). Fundamentally, ethnography is nonpositivist. It is inductive, does not engage assumptions of value-free or neutral observations, is historically and situationally bound (i.e., it may not be replicable or generalizable), and realizes the influence of the researchers on the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Typically, this research includes consideration of values, power, social structures, and human agency. An epistemological question essential to consider is: what constitutes legitimate knowledge? Ethnographic research is premised on the belief that there are multiple truths and multiple ways of seeing and
interpreting things (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). This tenet of ethnography infers that there are no absolute truths. Rather, the multiplicity of reality is acknowledged; each person socially constructs, interprets, and reacts to social settings. Individuals with different social positions may interpret the same situation very differently. To assume that there is a singular knowable truth, the researcher runs the risk of overgeneralizing or dismissing an important and insightful version of reality (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000).

Additionally, all knowledge is historically and situationally bound. Human behaviour is a product of interactions with other people and the social world. Given different social circumstances, different behaviours may be observed. To understand the experiences of people, ethnographers realize that the world must be viewed through their eyes. Accordingly, their experiences are situated within a specific time and through their social position. To determine whose reality is “correct” is not the focus of ethnography; rather, understanding the social setting through the perspectives of the participants is the primary goal. Recognition of multiple social realities lends a deductive approach to research moot. A priori hypotheses become problematic in that they guide researchers to examine issues of importance to the researcher, and not necessarily what the social group members believe is important. The inductive or emergent nature of ethnography does not mean that it is atheoretical. Contrary, theory is important to help focus initial observations, identify essential data, and direct continued observations and interviews (Frow & Morris, 2000). Smith and Deemer (2000) expressed that observation cannot be theory-free as it is impossible to separate description of phenomena from
interpretation. Wolcott (1995) further contended that all qualitative research should be
grounded in a conceptual or theoretical framework through which one observes,
interprets, records, and analyzes social settings. In some cases, this inductive stance
may result in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in which a conceptual
framework arises from the data.

When beginning an ethnographic study, researchers have a general sense of
what they want to investigate, but precise research questions may not exist. Rather, the
researcher enters the field with scholarly curiosity about a particular topic and begins
observations with an open mind as to what might lead to more specific research
questions. In other words, the design is emergent (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998); it develops
as more knowledge is gained about the setting.

Considering that sport has its own culture and within that larger culture, each
type of sport (e.g., rugby vs. ice hockey vs. cross-country running), as well as each
individual sport team, has a unique (sub)culture, ethnography is well suited for
investigating sport settings. Krane and Baird (2005) believe it is impossible to begin to
comprehend athletes’ mental states and behaviours without first understanding the
social norms and culture that encompass them. As applied sport and exercise
psychology researchers shift from a predominantly positivist to alternative
epistemologies, ethnography provides an avenue for further advancing our knowledge.
Acknowledging and examining multiple truths, or versions of reality, in sport and
exercise contexts and connecting the culture of sport to athletes’ thoughts and
behaviours will provide new avenues for consideration of applied issues. The various
methodological and epistemological perspectives that may be employed in ethnography create new and exciting opportunities for applied sport, exercise and health psychology.

4.2 Performing Ethnography

The process of ethnography begins with identifying an area of scholarly curiosity, entering that group, and ultimately creating a thick, rich ethnographic record of the group (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The process of data collection continually overlaps with that of analysis, interpretation and representation as emerging themes, codes and concepts are considered, emphasized, and discarded. Constant comparison is employed from the onset as various forms of data (field notes, observations, interviews, text analysis, group discussions) are analyzed and interpreted and connections are forged between existing and emerging conceptual ideas and theoretical frameworks.

Gaining Entry

Once a particular research interest or question has been established, the first step in performing ethnography is to gain entry to the environment of interest. This often requires the researcher(s) to identify and contact the “gatekeeper.” Gatekeepers are the people who control access to other group members, group activities, and sources of information (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In the sport context, examples of gatekeepers include athletic administrators, managers, coaches, and team captains (Sands, 2002). Gaining initial entry involves building rapport, developing trust, and garnering interest with gatekeepers to obtain access into the field (LeCompte &
Schensul, 1999). The gatekeeper’s final decision will either grant researchers access to
the setting or dismiss them all together (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). In
some circumstances, gaining entry may be quite easy because the researcher already
has established rapport with the participants as a team member, coach, or sport
psychologist. However, when the researcher does not have an established rapport with
a team she or he must work to gain entry. This is an ongoing process of establishing and
maintaining competence and sincerity as the researcher (Ely, 1991).

The researcher can increase the chances of gaining entry to the group through
building rapport with “key informants.” Key informants are respected and
knowledgeable individual with clout and influential positions in the group (Taylor &
Bogdan, 1998). Because of their status in the group, they can help convince other group
members to engage in the researcher’s study. The process of recognizing key informants
and establishing reciprocal relationships with them will take time, yet these
relationships are essential. Building rapport with key informants and other members of
the group will increase accessibility to group activities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The
relationships sustained will enrich and foster the researcher’s acquisition of knowledge
about the group.

Observation

Observation is the backbone of ethnographic research (Ely, 1991; Taylor &
Bogdan, 1998). It has been described as taking mental pictures with a wide-angle lens
(Spradley, 1980) and “becoming a human vacuum cleaner” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995: 71)
or sponge. Observation allows researchers to gain a broad description and
understanding of the workings of a social group. The stance of an observer ranges from observer to participant, or pure observation to pure participation (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). When taking an observation-only role, the researcher watches group activities from an objective perspective. At the opposite end of the continuum, a researcher may take on a covert, participant-only role, in which the researcher passes as a member of the social group and does not tell the participants that she or he is a researcher. Researchers also may take on roles in between these two stances: observer participant (mostly observing but with participation in a minor social role) or participant observer (participating in the daily activities of the social group while conducting observations; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). There are advantages and disadvantages of each stance. The more covert a researcher, the more likely she or he will truly learn the inner workings of a group. However, this stance is also plagued with ethical issues, particularly related to participant deception. Covert researchers also have the stress of ‘being undercover’ and not ‘blowing their cover’ and losing access.

Complete observation may be the best or only way to gather data in some situations. For example, when members of a social group are visibly different from the researcher, it may be difficult to participate in group activities. This may occur, for example, when adults study children or an able-bodied individual investigates athletes with disabilities. Alternatively, when the researcher is a member of a social group being studied, it may be best to take an observer only stance to gain new perspective and notice details previously taken for granted. More often in ethnography, the participant-observer stance is taken in which the researchers do their best to fit into the setting, yet
their role as a researcher is known to the participants. This stance seems to be most common in sport ethnography. In participant-observation, the researcher joins the culture under study, becomes involved in their daily activities, and personally experiences life as the participants do (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Butts (2001), who studied surfers was resolute about the necessity of participant observation in learning about a culture. As he explained, only through participation can a researcher accurately represent a culture, in all its complexity. Butts also noted that the experience of riding a wave can only be captured through personal experience; interview data from surfers would not capture its nuance. This dual role of participant as well as observer demands patience, skill, and role juggling abilities. This was the position taken in the current study.

Observation involves attending to the many events that may be occurring at a single time, including subtle eavesdropping and probing by asking questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The researcher conscientiously observes social interactions and patterns, conversations, events, and all the seemingly mundane activities inherent to a particular setting. It is important to observe and record as much detail about the environment as possible. Initially, it is difficult to determine what will be important data. Lofland and Lofland (1995) refer to this initial period in observation as “mucking about.” The observational lens of the researcher starts out with a broad focus noting primarily descriptive aspects of the culture. As the research progresses, the focus narrows as specific research questions emerge from initial observations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Holt and Sparkes (2001) provided an example of an emergent design in their study of team cohesion. Initially, there focus was on peak performance in soccer players but
gradually, it became apparent that cohesion was mediating individual and team peak performances. Therefore, their focus turned toward constructs influencing team cohesion: preparation strategies, player conflicts, and how players interpreted situations differently. Eventually, toward the end of the observation period, the focus narrowed further to examine player roles, game situations, relationships among players, and key incidents influencing team cohesion.

*The Ethnographic Record*

Using various forms of data collection, the researcher produces a detailed ethnographic account/record of the chosen (sub)culture (Berg, 2001). This record vividly recreates the observed culture and all of its “players.” Observational, interview, textual, photographic, and questionnaire data may comprise the ethnographic record.

All observations are recorded and entered into the ethnographic record through copious logging. The first step in generating rich data is to take field notes. Field notes are written memos completed while in the field, during an observation or immediately following an experience in the field. By necessity field notes are brief; yet they should be a complete, although concise, account of the days’ observations including descriptions of participants’ actions, conversations, and events (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). They may be completed while in the field or immediately after leaving it. If and when notes are taken in the field, they are typically no more than a few words jotted down about each major occurrence, later used to trigger the researcher’s memory (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). It is important that field notes only include what is observed without inferences or assumptions about behaviours or appearance. These notes should be a
descriptive account of the activities of the people and setting providing a written photograph of the setting (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). More complete notes as well as initial analysis occur in the research log.

*The Research Log*

Capturing detailed description in the immediate present in the field is difficult to capture and so it is important to translate shorthand reminders in the field notes into the research log (Berg, 2001; Ely, 1991). The research log is a precise account of the research setting and all interactions. It is characterized by elaborate details originating from memories and brief reminders in the field notes (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Because memories fade and internal analysis begins as time passes, field notes should be translated into the research log as soon as possible (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Ideally, the research log is completed immediately after an observation. No more than 24 hours should lapse before attending to one’s research log, and certainly another observation should not occur before notes from the previous observation are logged. Emerson et al. also suggested that researchers should not talk about their observation until after notes are written so not to confound their memories with interpretations of the events.

As much detail and description as possible should be included in the log. The contents of this research log comprise the data to be analyzed subsequently. While the field notes should be descriptive accounts of daily activity in the field, the research log also contains researcher insights and interpretation through analytic notes. As Ely (1991) suggested, analytic notes are a way to create an inner dialogue about the research at
hand. They are often reflections concerning events, themes, or insights about the data. It is important to keep the observations separate from reflections to avoid conflating interpretation of the setting with the physical/behavioural account of the setting (Berg, 2001; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Thus, researchers should develop a format for distinguishing between what was observed and what is researcher interpretation.

4.3 Participants

All participants were members of a local road running club between January 2011 and January 2012. The running club consisted of 150 or so members who ranged in age, ability and experience. The club was open and inclusive to anyone who wished to pay the annual membership fee and offers multiple organized runs throughout the week for members to join. The club also hosts a small number of annual races and social events that members are encouraged to attend. The researcher had joined the running club several months prior to conducting the study and participants were thus a convenience sample of individuals who were considered and identified as ‘committed and competitive’ recreational runners with whom the lead investigator had known through his own membership in the club. Participants were ‘chosen’ due to the quantity of running (commitment to training) they did as well as the quality of their running (performance in competition). Formal interviews were conducted on 15 participants (10 male; 5 female) who in order to be considered for an interview, had to respond in the
affirmative to the following inclusion criteria: “I am highly committed to my running behaviours” and “I consider running to be an important and valuable part of my life.”

The typical participant was a committed and competitive distance runner that had been running for a minimum of 5 years. They would run on average 5-7 days a week and do a small amount of supplemental training such as core and strength workouts, flexibility and stretching, spinning, yoga and/or aerobics in addition. Participants ranged in age between 25 and 52 years. They ran between 75 and 150km per week all year long and would compete in at least a dozen road races during a calendar year. They belonged to a local running club but had run independently/solo for several years before joining or had been members of other running clubs. They were currently or had previously been training for a ‘goal’ race which would take between 3 and 6 months. They could be described as health-conscious and were of a ‘normal healthy’ weight and body composition. Running was considered a priority and an important aspect of their daily life and routine.

Participants represent a small and increasingly rare sample of physically active adults who dedicate tremendous amounts of time and energy to an activity for which there are few financial or tangible rewards and for which there is no pressure to remain involved. They are thus a special population who represent a small minority of physically active and fit individuals who exist at a time when sedentary behaviours and inactivity have become the norm (Colley et al., 2011). Their behaviours represent and highlight a commitment and dedication to physical activity (exercise and sport) that is rarely seen in current society and the reasons and explanations for this will be further explored.
According to prevailing norms within the running subculture, all of the participants of the current study would classify as 'non-elite,' meaning that they stand "no realistic chance of winning or being highly placed in any category within a race" (Smith, 2000: 188). They are all however, serious, highly committed and competitive recreational runners, as opposed to joggers. Smith (1998) makes the categorical distinction (familiar to most sub-cultural insiders) between (a) athletes—elite runners who are potential race-winners and stand to gain substantial financial remuneration and compensation; (b) runners, “who run and train, week in and week out, at levels far in excess of that required for basic physical fitness, yet stand no realistic chance of winning, or doing well in any race”; and (c) joggers/fun runners, who train infrequently, only in fair weather, and race even more infrequently, if at all (p. 176). With the booming popularity of running and racing, joggers/fun runners are becoming increasingly present at running events/races and now make up the majority of the participants. Runners make up a sizable minority with the (elite) athletes making up a very small minority, and are at times completely absent. It should be noted that although the non-elite category is most fitting for the study participants and the social group (running club) as a whole; there are a select few runners who do place highly (top 5, 10, 50) in even fairly large running events (100, 200, 1000 participants) and often win or place consistently within their 5 year age category. The participants should thus not be considered 'average' runners but amateur and perhaps sub-elite.

While only 15 (10 male, 5 female) individuals were chosen to conduct formal interviews, several dozen others were continuously ‘used’ to influence the data and
participated in informal conversations, group discussions, were included in group email exchanges or were observed in a running-related context. Moreover, the researcher himself could be considered a participant in that his own implicit involvement as a member of the running club and collector of various forms of data, will undoubtedly have influenced his own behaviours and interactions with others. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the document to confer autonomy to all participants who consented to participate in the current study.

4.4 Data Collection

It is important to note that from the beginning, the interest of the investigator in the runners as an academic and research focus were explicitly known and not meant to be covert. For those interested or who inquired, it was quickly pointed out that ‘research’ was being conducted investigating commitment to physical activity as well as psychological and social aspects of distance running adherence. As the research evolved, the research questions (What does running mean to you? Why do you do it? What do you get out of it?) were presented and openly discussed with participants.

The process of data collection was done primarily through informal conversations and group discussions such as before, during and following training runs, workouts, races as well as at social gatherings, during transit, etc. Data was also documented via observations, field notes, formal interviews and email exchanges between the investigator and the participants.
Given the relatively long history with the club/group and the established rapport between the investigator and participants, there was no reason to believe that participants would have attempted to withhold information or conform to any social desirability bias. In many respects, participants were brutally honest and forward about their running behaviours and disclosed information and ‘data’ that would not have been available otherwise. All interactions with participants and within the club setting were approached as potential data and, as a participant himself, the investigator was able to absorb all types of data and then ‘filter’ and isolate what was considered to be salient and relevant given his own stake and position in the research. By constantly being self-reflexive and critical to his own assumptions and biases recorded in the form of a reflexive journal, the investigator was able to relate closely with the participants and live as one of them, as an ‘insider’ and a contributing and valuable part of the subculture who shared and contributed to the ‘lived experiences’ with and among others. This of course was one of the main weaknesses or limitations of the study in that the investigator was interpreting and representing the ‘worldview’ of not only the participants and the larger social group, but also his own social group and thus was likely to see and interpret things in a particular way.

Initial contact between the researcher and participants was made in September 2010, when the lead investigator joined the local running club for the first time. Over a period of weeks and months, he was able to integrate into the club and come to be accepted and trusted by many of its members. His unique position and status as a
respected and esteemed member of the club afforded him the opportunity to interact and associate closely with the participants in pursuit of the research question(s).

Entering into the club environment was relatively simple as the running club was open to anyone interested and membership involved only a small nominal fee. Thus, unlike many other types of (sub)cultures, there were no clear "gatekeepers" to police entry. The first step to gaining entry was for the investigator to introduce himself to current members and identify fellow runners who were at a similar level of ability in which to run with. The running club had a coach who he spoke with about previous running and training history and the coach suggested he run with a particular group of males, all highly experienced and many veterans of the club. Before his first run with the club, the investigator spoke with several other runners and quickly got a sense for the various levels of runners the club possessed and decided to attempt to run with the faster group of clearly 'serious' runners. He successfully managed to survive the first workout with them and thus afforded him some respect from the others. From this point, he maintained regular contact with the group by attending weekly runs and began to establish familiarity and rapport with them. Within a few months of training three times per week with the group, he had developed a strong rapport and established trust with many of his fellow club members and was well on his way to becoming a valued member of the group.

Field Notes

Field note taking began early in the ethnographic exploration in the Fall of 2010. They were written often immediately following a given run or workout and either before
or after interacting at the bar post run. All notes were made in a running log which included details of the run (distance, pace, perceived effort), weather conditions, who was present and absent, what was discussed in conversations, and who spoke about what. Some were very short and summarized prolonged conversations in a single word or statement. Other, more detailed accounts, included “hot topics,” debates, heated conversations, as well as any accompanying observations of emotional outbursts or cognitive processes.

*Interviews*

Formal interviews were conducted, recorded and immediately transcribed in the Fall/Winter of 2011. These interviews sought to more directly explore some of the themes and ideas which had emerged from earlier observations and the analysis of the research log. They were open-ended but semi-structured (see Appendix 3) and allowed for participants to guide the flow of conversation. The interview schedule was loosely followed as questions were asked of some, but not all, where appropriate. Spontaneous questioning and probing was particularly useful for gathering the most open and honest responses. All interviews were reviewed and immediately transcribed by the researcher and note-taking/memoing was done to generate early codes and themes. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their autonomy.

Having interacted with participants for the better part of a year and knowing many of them well, the information garnered is considered highly accurate and sincere. Follow-up interviews, often informal and never transcribed, were added to the growing
database of hand-written and computer generated texts which described and detailed the evolving research focus.

*Research Log and Self-reflexive Journal*

A detailed running log was used to jot down immediate observations following being in the field and later elaborated upon where necessary. Personal reflections and insights were done alongside these observations and labelled clearly as such. Typed documents pertaining to evolving themes and ideas were also created at various stages of the process and linked together under new headings and titles as the analytic process continued. A self-reflexive journal was also employed to document the personal insights of the researcher in relation to the increasing data and analysis process. Thoughts, opinions, emotions, and behaviours related to the investigators own running experiences in relation to the research questions were continuously recorded and reviewed in a critical manner. The complete research log thus consists of several partially filled notebooks, email correspondences, typed and hand written (scribbled) texts, diagrams, complete and partial participant quotes, training logs, transcribed and coded interviews and several more.

*4.5 Data Analysis*

There is recognition in qualitative analysis that research design, data collection and analysis are simultaneous and continuous processes (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) that constantly evolve and change as particular observations support or refute past events. Thematic analysis was used as an analytical tool which seeks to extract meaning in the
form of themes, ideas and synthesizing concepts. As with many other qualitative analysis, it is important that the researcher becomes familiar with their data if the analysis is to be trusted, informative and insightful. Thus data familiarisation is as key to thematic analysis as it is for other qualitative methods. As data came in from various sources, it was written down (in research logs), repeated (transcribed interviews) and read and re-read. Notes were continually taken and revisited. Written data underwent open, axial and selective coding which contributed to the generation of key concepts, ideas, themes which were then organized into categories, subcategories and eventually applied to relevant ‘theoretical frameworks.’ The qualitative data analysis process including data collection, transcription, coding, note-taking, and reflection would ultimately contribute to the generation of an explanation of how a commitment to physical activity, specifically distance running, was contributing to participant cognitions, emotions and behaviours and the meaning and significance this had to their lives.

Chapter 5: Findings

The purpose of the present study was to explore the meaning, value and significance of exercise behaviours using a select sample of highly committed and adherent recreational runners. By becoming a participant observer and active member in a local running club, the researcher was able to gain access and insight into this unique social context and interact and investigate the various meanings that participants ascribe to their running-related cognitions, emotions and behaviours.
The most prominent themes to emerge from the ethnography highlight the ways in which participants commitment and adherence to physical activity behaviours, specifically distance running as a form of amateur sport, contribute to the fulfillment of various ‘needs’ and desires. This commitment was evident by ways in which participants continuously strive to become competent and achieve mastery in their chosen activity; persevere in the long term; and are persistently dedicated to personal improvement thus fulfilling the need for competence and autonomy as proposed in self determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). All engaged in various forms of individual and collective competition which acted to justify and validate ones efforts as well as subject them to a social world and ethos with opportunities for building relationships and meaningful shared experiences. In time, participants forge both an autonomous individual and collective social identity based on their participation in the activity which became valued over time and meets one’s needs for belonging, acceptance, and relatedness. Finally, participants accrue numerous additional rewards and benefits which act to both maintain one’s involvement in the sport as well as to motivate one to advance and move forward. These rewards include an enhanced sense of self-esteem, confidence, and accomplishment as well as lasting physical health and fitness benefits. What results is an adaptive and deeply enriching lifestyle of recreational physical activity and that provides unique contributions to physical, psychological and social well-being which is maintained in the long term.
5.1 Fulfilling ‘Needs’

Running was used adaptively and effectively to fulfil a number of specific needs, wants and desires which have been suggested by others to be ‘universal’ (Maslow, 1954). Such needs include the desire to feel secure, to be healthy, to be loved, belonging, relating to others, being competent, having autonomy, and gaining a sense of self-esteem, confidence, and achievement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1954).

At the most basic level, running and physical activity serves physiological and perhaps evolutionary needs to seek and attain water, food, shelter and survival. Obviously, this is no longer the case in the Western world and 21st century in which we now live but, as one participant explain, the act of running and being active serve to fulfill an almost primal need to connect with our past ancestors and way of life: "I know we were designed to do more than sit on a sofa... I am a descendant of an innumerable number of runners, an unbroken chain of humans in motion right back to the cradle of mankind" (Simon B).

Running was also seen to fulfil the need for personal security/safety mainly in the form of physical health and well-being. Perhaps oddly, the physical ‘products’ of running adherence, although mentioned, seem least valued by participants: “I do it for health reasons. Of course that’s a part of it. It makes me feel more productive, helps manage stress of life, work out aggression, helps to be social” (Reid C). These physical products included: a high level of physical fitness (cardiovascular capacity, muscular endurance, body composition), improved quality of sleep, an ability to concentrate and focus, the ‘promise’ of increased longevity, a slowing of the aging process, higher energy
levels, a lower resting heart rate and blood pressure, energy balance and metabolic control, weight regulation, and lower incidence of illness. However, such benefits seem to be considered a “bonus,” a “by-product” or an “extra” feature of an activity that would be pursued even if such benefits were not available. Given that levels of physical activity are greatly exceeding that which would be minimally required for health and fitness, it became clear that running was not being done for these reasons alone. This observation would seem to suggest that rather than fulfilling a lower order need for safety and security which Maslow included ‘health and well-being’ as a part of, participants were engaging in such behaviours for ‘higher’ order needs for belonging, esteem and perhaps self-actualization.

“I don’t even think of it as exercise to be frank. I think of it as running. I love running to such a degree that I wouldn’t really give it up for much. I get high from running so the value to me is not necessarily physical fitness... The other thing is the performance aspect, the improvement. It’s very easy to quantify. There’s something to that. I get satisfaction from improving.” Cam L

If not then for health and fitness, what were the ‘products’ that running was providing that were so valued and sought after by participants? As should become increasingly clear, a number of psychological and social products, needs and desires were being met through a commitment to physical activity, in this case, through distance running.
5.2 The Need to Persevere

“It’s not always the end result that’s important; it’s the process of getting there.” Eric G

The desire of participants to overcome and persevere through any and all adversity and maintain one’s behaviour in the long-term, despite short-term setbacks, appears stable and consistent. Participants alluded to and described perseverance as the need to manage, overcome and “survive” (Reid C) a particular training season or cycle which often lasted for months, and perhaps a year or more. During this period, the goal was to improve gradually over time by incorporating different forms of training (endurance, strength and speed) with the goal of “peaking” at a particular time, almost always for a particular event (competition).

Perseverance meant putting in the time, the daily miles which, in themselves, produce a very minor effect but it is the long term collective effort which impacts one’s performance. Over a longer period, perseverance refers to the development or improvement of the participant over multiple cycles which can take years. There is an assumption, heralded almost as truth, among runners that becoming the best one can possibly be takes multiple years. For many participants, seven years was the point at which one should expect best results: “Running is not a short-term solution with immediate payoff; it is a long term plan. A seven year plan” (Megan B). Another called it “the five year plan” (Ryan H). It requires patience, self-control, intelligence and a long term outlook: “I’ve come to realize that for myself, it’s [running] an integral life long commitment, it’s an everyday thing, not every day but a consistent thing; on par with eating sleeping, bathing, and an essential element of life” (Simon B).
Successful adherence means setting short (daily, weekly, monthly) as well as long term goals (a season, a year, seven years). It means being consistent from day to day, week to week, season to season, and year to year which requires succeeding at individual runs, workouts, and races. Overcoming injury, illness, staleness, burnout, and overtraining are common to all runners at some point in time and require learned patience and practice. Running means handling other obligations and responsibilities, effectively managing one’s time and being organized, balancing social, work, school, family life, and having to deal with both the expected and unexpected. It involves overcoming a bad race, performance, workout, easy run etc. and not becoming overly concerned with minor setbacks but rather seeing the big picture or long-term goal.

Running is ‘about’ learning and reflecting from past experience and moving forward. Not making the same mistakes. Trying new approaches and taking risks. The activity is carefully planned and scheduled which provides consistency and structure. The ultimate goal of this is to increase one’s ‘knowledge’ and ability, to become skilled and competent, to achieve mastery: “I know what works, I know what doesn’t. I’m still tinkering, trying new things. But hey, it’s another thing. Especially with running, especially with the marathon, it’s a long term goal. It’s a long term process. It’s a seven year project. It is not a one season, it is not a one week, it is not how many kilometres can I run this week. It is like an endgame thing and the game is big and I actually think that’s very healthy because I think life is like that too” (Rob W).
5.3 Competence and Mastery

“It’s like anything else when you get really really deeply involved in it. The thoughts just keep rolling around your mind, you’re studying it, and you become a student of it. You’re devouring as much information as you possibly can. You’re reading all the books, you’re reading up online, the info is all new, it’s all exciting, you’re able to compare your own personal experiences to what you’re reading about. You’re seeing results, you’re seeing the upside of it, and you become kinda obsessive.” Reid C

In order to achieve success in distance running, one must first acquire the basic skills and knowledge needed to train and run effectively. Based on one’s goals and level of commitment, the time and energy available to devote to the pursuit of such skills will vary but the fundamental principles are the same. The volume of training (total mileage, frequency, duration, intensity) is something that one must tailor to their individual needs and abilities. This is a learned process often through personal reflection and by seeking out important others (coaches, training partners, more experienced runners) who can offer advice and suggestions: “I have learned there is a time to run fast and a time to run slow. And if you try to run fast all the time, you will just end up running slow. It’s taken a while to get there. It’s learned through training. No benefit to pushing all the time.” Dylan W

Due to their continued pursuit of attaining running competence and mastery, participants eventually and gradually come to ‘know’ running and reap various benefits and rewards from it. They derive physical, psychological and social benefits which validate and contribute to the maintenance of their participation and pursuit of running.
Immense physical efforts are required to run daily, weekly, monthly, and over the long term (for years). This involves developing a base of endurance then adding speed, strength and specificity. Suffering, pain and discomfort are viewed as part of the activity: “It will suck at times” (Eric G). Running requires developing technical skills through practice including good running form and efficiency.

It is also important to educate oneself. To become knowledgeable of the sport or activity including: its history, the professional/elite scene, specific races and events, geography, nutrition, human physiology, anatomy, and biochemistry/metabolism, psychology, training principles, equipment, apparel, gear and brands, etc. This is done through constant reading, reviewing, and researching. It means “becoming a student of the sport and everything it involves” (Simon B). Running also involves “doing the extra supplemental stuff (Megan B)”: stretching, core work, strength training, flexibility, diet and nutrition, hydration, mental training, strategizing, rest and recovery. “It’s about so much more than simply running” (Kate V).

“Knowing” running becomes both a process and a product. If there is one thing that runners (participants) liked to talk about, it would be running! How far they run. How fast they run. Where they run. When they run. How many miles they run each week, each month, each year. What they’re training for. What they’ve run in the past. What they’ll run in the future. What they eat. What they wear. What equipment they use. What equipment they DON’T use! And the list goes on and on.

It became apparent that participants were neither simply exercising for fitness nor were they running for physical health. A key outcome from studying committed and
competitive albeit recreational or amateur athletes was their shared desire and goal to become better, to improve and to advance at their chosen activity; to accomplish mastery and to be increasingly competent. The idea of continual self-improvement, being better today than you were yesterday and better still tomorrow, is an important theme and this becomes a salient long-term (weeks, months, years) goal. All participants would discuss their goals, both past and present. They would talk about how they achieved success in the past and the strategy that would likely lead to future success. They spoke of the past, and where they had begun, the present and where they were now, as well as the future and where they would like to be. Everyone expressed the shared desire to improve and to continue to improve indefinitely. Few areas of life could boast and offer the promise of continual growth and improvement and fewer still were so entirely within an individual's own control. Every participant was well aware of their own role in creating their own destiny. They took personal responsibility both for success and for failure. As will be discussed later, this constant and continual desire to improve shares many similarities to the ideas of self-actualization, group accomplishment (particularly in the club/group setting) and personal enrichment.

It should be noted however that the participants desire for mastery and competence appear to be related to their privileged status as middle-class, educated, Caucasians who have ample time, energy and resources to expend on such pursuits. While exploring other and more diverse populations and perspectives was not the purpose of the current study, it should not be denied that participants were advantaged
in numerous ways which contributes to their ability to commit and participate at their current level.

5.4 Competition

“It gives me accomplishments and successes to strive for and a way to continually improve and realize my potential in an objective, measurable way.” Eric G

“It has nothing to do with others, or being patted on the back. It has to do with my competitiveness and my challenging myself and actually being quite successful and that’s important to me.” Dayna P

“Now, rewards are intangible: a PB on a race; achieving a certain time or goal; a sense of accomplishment.” Dylan W

As one continues to acquire skills and knowledge and develops competence in the area of running, they begin to feel as sense of attachment to the activity which, as will be discussed, contributes to the development of a unique personal and social identity. This competence also creates a sense of self-satisfaction and accomplishment which promotes further investment in the activity and validates one's efforts. There are various ways in which one's mastery of running is further validated and recognized. The most common is through a race or performance. The best way to track one's progress in the sport is to compare race results. Running faster and lowering one's running times
are a clear indication that one is improving. Racing is a prominent part of the participants running "career." These are the “tests” that confirm the weeks and months of hard training and gauge one’s progress in the sport. Racing is an objective way of measuring improvement and success.

Participants were not only partaking in the complex world of distance running, but in the unique specialization of road racing. All highly value the competitive and performance aspect of their activity/sport and so choose to actively engage in multiple competitions in which they perform to the best of their ability. Unlike a majority of middle and back of the pack ‘running participants’ these ‘road racers’ compete at or near the front of the pack, 'just' behind the elites, where they contest for age group placing and sub-elite status. This affords them attention, recognition and praise from the larger running community as well as the respect and admiration of others less capable. Such rewards are fulfilling the belonging and esteem needs of all individuals as suggested by Maslow (1954) in that participants gain a sense of confidence, accomplishment and are respected and recognized by their peers.

All participants were actively working towards achieving specific and highly subjective running related goals. Once those goals were achieved, they would then set their sights higher and continue to adjust and adopt new goals. The majority of participants are setting goals specifically pertaining to performance outcomes (i.e. I want to run this distance in this amount of time). This is where achievement orientation and a competitive orientation become important. All participants are competitive, either with themselves or with others, or both. Males appear to be more ego driven and
tend to compete with others: “I want to be the first guy [from the group] to finish. I want to be the one to chase” (Cam L) and “It’s nice to be the guy that wins the race or beats your training partners in practice. It’s important to have others to compete with. It makes you better” (Dave S). Women on the other hand tend to set personal goals and are less concerned with competing against others: “I run my own race and do what I know I am able to do. I’m not concerned with who else in on the line. I don’t care who’s ahead and who’s behind” (Tarah K) and “For me, it’s about setting my own goals. Nothing and no one else can interfere with what I am trying to achieve” (Megan B).

Goals are both short and long term. A long term goal might be the time that one wishes to run an upcoming marathon. Short term goals would be completing the weekly distance and daily workouts needed to achieve that goal. Goals must be both realistic (attainable) but also ambitious and worthy of pursuit.

Although rarely the original reason for one to become seriously involved and committed to their exercise behaviour, competition eventually becomes a driving force behind continued involvement in the activity: “Competing has become a huge thing for me. A numbers game, I want a better number” (Tarah K) and “I only do it because I like to compete. I wouldn’t run on my own just to say it was fun” (Ryan H). Improvement in a very subjective sense becomes a salient goal that is continually adjusted as targets are reached and one’s potential changes: “…put my mind and body on the line and push it as far as it will go…” (Dave S). Due to the wide range of ages and abilities reflected in the sample, one’s goals and ambitions were highly subjective and based largely on age: “I can’t run as fast as some but can run faster than someone else, it’s all kinda relative that
way” (Cam L). It was clear that each participant was striving for very personal goals. These goals are influenced both by past performances and prior results, but also by the input and suggestions of others: “I am also highly competitive with myself, the clock and others” (Dayna P) and “Through my coaches, my peers and my recent results, I know exactly what I am capable of” (Matt L). In the context of running, most goals are time related: What is the fastest time one can run a given distance? However, for some, a particular place or ranking in relation to others is an important outcome. This represents a preference for either ego or task orientation in relation to motivation. The desire to outperform others, win competitions and be the best relative to others represents an ego achievement orientation. Setting personal goals, performing at one’s best and bettering one’s own accomplishments is referred to as task orientation. These contrasting concepts are often present in the context of sport settings and have important implications for the performance and success of an athlete in competition. Regardless, competition is an important part of the subculture of distance running and all participants have and continue to test themselves, their goals and their aspirations by lining up in a race.

5.5 Identity

“I’ve learned a work ethic through running and through the lifestyle that I’ve adopted through running. And I like running because I’m good at it... people are attracted to things they are good at. You gain praise, you have successes, it comes perhaps easier to
you than to your peers or in a perceived sense or whatever and so you feel good at it, you feel good about doing it. It becomes part of who you are.” Megan B

5.5.1 Personal Identity and Autonomy

“I’m always going to exercise, that’s a given. I can’t imagine life without it. I can’t imagine not... like I said before: It’s as intrinsic as eating and breathing and sleeping. I think that’s an attitude that is perhaps sorely missed culturally and needs to be adopted. So ya, I would say it’s part of daily life...It’s a daily process thing. I leave room for it in every day of my life, in one way or another.” Kate V

“Running comes naturally to me. It’s beyond commitment; it’s part of who I am. It feels inseparable. I don’t feel like I’ve made that mental decision. Most people I meet are not like this; they don’t have it.” Reid C

“One thing that’s consistent is that physical activity is important. There’s a lot of personal benefit in that: In just making that a priority.” Tarah K

“[Physical activity] becomes an established behaviour that has always been in your life so you work to maintain it. I don’t know any better so I continue to do it.” Katie V

Participants were sometimes hesitant and often unable to articulate the importance of running as a personal identity but clearly this is a major component of
who they are: “I just love it. It is who I am” (Ryan H). The time spent pursuing the activity in terms of training and racing (“I don’t feel the need to justify it [time spent running]. It’s something I love to do. I just enjoy being active. I choose physical activity over other activities.” (Katie V)), the money spent on products, apparel, race fees, etc., the energy expended to perform gruelling physical effort and the continued commitment to all facets of running are a testament to the value and significance of the activity to participants lives: “I’ve invested a lot in terms of time, energy, money, emotional effort into running specifically. I would say its one of my primary hobbies, and it’s a serious hobby” (Dylan W).

Whether participants admit it or not, their commitment to the activity means they are runners and are viewed and identified as such. They may not base their own identity upon this particular activity or emphasize their involvement, but they are all clearly aware and complacent in accepting that this is an important part of who they are and how they are seen by others. Some identify strongly with the activity, and as one said: “I strive to be three things in life. A good husband, a good employee, and a good runner;” (Cam L) while others try to diminish the importance such behaviours are seen to play in their lives: “It’s a hobby; that’s it” (Dave S). For most runners, and certainly all participants, a key feature of this identity is that of autonomy. Autonomy refers to the ability of a self-governing, rational individual to exercise control over their behaviours, thoughts and actions and make informed, un-coerced decisions. Running is a choice and one which is made freely. Furthermore, the amount of commitment one devotes to running is also a choice. For many, exercise is a behaviour which is viewed and
promoted as a healthy and socially accepted behaviour that should be done as part of a healthy lifestyle and when engaged for these reasons it is not entirely autonomous. Regardless of the reasons that it was initiated, running in this study was seen by participants as an activity that is maintained autonomously and voluntarily and from which they were being rewarded with various rewards and benefits. They devote significant periods of time to the sport, have their close social interactions within the running club environment, spend money and participate in the consumption of the sport (apparel, gadgets, gear, books, magazines, physiotherapy, massage, races, travel, social activity, etc).

Becoming and ‘being’ a runner also involves investment in the unique social world previous discussed. It means buying into, often literally, the culture of running and conforming to certain norms, attitudes and ‘rules’ pertinent to the sport. This involves purchasing specific brands of clothing, shoes, gear and accessories. It means participating in running events and races, becoming knowledgable about the sport and developing related and relevant skills and abilities, as well as training in ways that conform to current practices within the sport culture. It means learning the lingo including such running specific terms like: bonking, hitting the wall, tempo, fartlek, bandit, LSD, taper, ITB and many more. Running isn’t merely enough, being a runner requires a cherished personal identity based on one’s commitmen to running as well as being views by others as a ‘runner.’

A “running identity” will mean different things to different people but in this instance was thought to comprise several features. The first was the importance that
participants placed on the discussion of running as a topic of conversation. This involves chatting, conversing, talking, and debating all things running. All participants spent considerable amounts of their time discussing all things running. A second feature was that related to looking like a runner and involves the type of clothing, gear, and accessories that make runners identifiable: Garmin watches, Boston jackets, particular brands (Adidas, New Balance, Saucony, Mizuno) of shoes and athletic clothing, bumper stickers, etc. Participants could clearly be distinguished from non-runners in a number of settings. A third feature is that runners often easily identify themselves and others as runners and are well aware of other runners including close competitors and elite/sub-elite runners. There is no shortage of interaction with other runners while training, racing and before and after such events. Many runners join clubs/groups for this very reason as they hope to meet others who share their interests and also participate and attend events. This also involves a shared geography in that runners occupy similar spaces and places where they socialize, train, and perform.

A further defining feature and one more difficult to discern is an emphasis on diet and nutrition as it related to body weight and shape. The running body is considered lean, slender and light and is one maximized for performance. Diet and nutrition are considered essential aspects of attaining this running body and make up an important part of one’s training and running routine. Ultimately it becomes apparent that ones cognitions, emotions and behaviours often relate back to running and are considered in terms of “how will this affect my running?” It perhaps goes without saying that runners prioritize running as a salient and important part of their lives which in fact
becomes a lifestyle for them. From this lifestyle, participants were clearly meeting various needs for a sense of autonomy, independence, self-control, self-esteem, confidence, creativity, accomplishment and achievement and self-satisfaction and gratification.

5.5.2 Social Identity and Relatedness

"Now is the time to be generous in training. Use your training partners. Don't try to crush them. The last intervals in a workout are just as important as the first. The last surges. The last k's of a long run. Keep your squad intact from here on in. It's the only way to get what you want as an individual. A bit of a paradox but it works." Dave S

Continued improvement and increasing competence often involves a process of becoming initiated and integrated into a social sport/activity environment, usually as part of a club, team or group. One can only ever achieve so much on their own and becoming more competent (masterful) over time often requires seeking advice and support from others who offer their experience, knowledge and personal perspectives. Once one is accepted and integrated into the social environment, which involves expending time and energy to interact with others/the group and displaying a continued commitment to their own running, they are often rewarded with recognition and social support. Based on one’s objective success (a particular time in a race or an age-group award) and level of talent/ability, this process may some time to occur: “It wasn’t until I had a minor breakthrough and ran a sub 1:30 [half-marathon], that I won the approval of the other guys” (Rob W). This social recognition instills a desire to contribute to the
collective group effort and results in group accomplishment and a sense of contribution and group development: “I wanted to show [the coach] and the others that the training had paid off and I wanted to make the group proud” (Kate VB).

Most participants are, or were, members of a local running club and have belonged to other clubs/groups in the past. They all cite the importance of belonging to the group and having others to share their interests in: “I derive most of my gains and improvements from that [the club] (Ryan H);” “Exercise in social situations is more healthy (Megan B);” “I truly believe that running in a posse is the best way to get the best results”(Eric G).

In addition to engaging in a behaviour which provides an individual with a sense of autonomy and competence, often times there comes a desire for relatedness, which is the desire or need to interact, connect and socialize with like-minded, similar others. This is the third feature of 'self-determination theory,' and serves as a means of extrinsic motivation. Relatedness forms the basis for the development of a unique social identity that may be used to complement and advocate one's personal identity. While predominantly seen as an individual sport, there is a unique social aspect of running which is exemplified in the running club environment. Here you have a large total group of disparate individuals who come together multiple times per week to run, train and socialize together in their collective pursuit of self-improvement and advancement.

Within this larger group, many smaller groups form, often based on ability and shared goals, and who work together, as an impromptu team, to accomplish personal and individual goals. The social aspect of training becomes a valued and important
means of achieving one's personal goals (to become better) but also provides additional and (originally) unintended benefits including camaraderie, companionship, close friendships and relationships. Social facilitation contributes to overall mastery of the activity as participants push each other to improve and also increase enjoyment. Indeed, training groups begin to develop into close-knit and kindred social groups that find more in common than training and the shared activity.

There are also social rewards often experienced in many serious leisure activities and this is certainly true of running. One comes from the meeting of new people (runners), making new friends, and taking part in the affairs of the running group/club. Participants typically become members of a vast social world, a complex mosaic of groups, events, networks, organizations, and social relationships. While the running club does organize and support various social events where all members come together in a non-running environment to interact; more meaningful are the unofficial and unplanned interactions between members including following various runs and workouts, traveling to and from races and events, and other gatherings. Whether it’s meeting up at a restaurant or bar, going to a sporting event and other entertainment, or spending time together at each other’s homes, participants engage with each other outside the world of running and separate from the club environment. Running is the glue that binds these individuals together. Many of the participants have developed meaningful friendships among each other, some which have lasted years and decades. This social world is often further comprised of a public consisting of fans, an audience, and spectators. A second social reward is felt when the group accomplishes something significant,
exemplified in the running world by winning a team relay, organizing and staging a successful race/event, or being awarded a prestigious community honour for charitable contributions. People who contribute to the maintenance and development of the group often discover in such action a third social reward gained from their sense of being needed, of helping the collective, of making a valued contribution to its existence. Committed runners are often seen as leaders or role models within the running community and serve as a source of knowledge and experience. Others become needed in other ways such as organizing events, recruiting new members, or volunteering.

Many participants came into the sport as wanting to compete, improve and become better individual athletes. It is a personal and individual challenge and the group is simply something that can aid in achieving personal goals. The club/group is originally about finding others to push, to challenge, to force one to become better and is all about the individual. But at some point the social relationships that naturally form due the amount of time spent in the company of other runners becomes valued in and of itself and provides additional sources of motivation, meaning and significance. Conversations that happen before, during and after runs, time spent socializing outside the running environment and interactions online all contribute to a special social bond between individuals and to a collective identity. What ultimately results is the fulfilment of human social needs for love, friendship, acceptance, belonging, recognition, shared experiences, relatedness and the respect of and for others.
5.6 Psychological Flow

A further finding, which I will argue serves as another need or desire that participants seek to fulfill, and which could be used to explain their ongoing commitment to their chosen behaviours is that of 'psychological flow.' Psychological flow is an idea proposed by Csikszentmihalya (1975) and describes a state of being in which an individual is fully immersed, focused and involved in the process of an activity. It has been described as completely focused motivation and represents the complete harnessing of emotions and cognitions for the purpose of succeeding (performing through behaviour) at a particular task. Flow is considered an "autotelic" experience, a sensation that accompanies the actual performing of intrinsically rewarding activity and which becomes a key motivational force.

As will be further described subsequently and specifically applied to running participants running behaviours, Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1993) identify ten distinct, yet related and at times overlapping, factors which may accompany an experience of flow (note that not all are necessary for flow to be experienced):

1. Clear goals and expectations need to be clearly established and must align appropriately with one's level of competence. Both the challenge and skill level should both be sufficiently high.

2. A high degree of concentration, attention and focus must be given to the specific task/challenge.

3. A sense of losing self-consciousness occurs as cognitive awareness and emotions merge with behavioural action.
4. A distorted and inaccurate sense of time occurs in which one's subjective experience of time and space is altered.

5. Direct and immediate feedback including both successes and failures throughout the course of the activity are used adaptively so that behaviours can be adjusted as needed.

6. A balance exists between one’s competence level and challenge in that the activity is neither too easy nor too difficult.

7. A sense of autonomy and personal control over the situation and activity.

8. The activity is intrinsically rewarding, and perhaps even inherently enjoyable.

9. A lack or loss of awareness of bodily needs and external distractions.

10. Total and complete absorption/immersion into the activity. The focus of awareness and use of emotion is narrowed down to the activity itself, as if merging. Action with awareness fades into action alone.

Flow is strongly correlated with the subsequent and continuous development of further skills and personal growth which creates a conceptual link with the need to become self-actualized and reach one's full potential. When in a flow state, one is working to master the activity at hand and fulfilling one's need for competence through autonomous, intrinsically rewarding action. To maintain that flow state, one must seek increasingly greater challenges and must continue to invest available resources to develop further competencies. By continuously attempting these novel and increasingly difficult challenges, one may meet and even exceed their limitations of what was
considered possible. One may then emerge from such a flow experience having achieved personal growth, greater "feelings of competence and efficacy" (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2005) and perhaps the (partial) fulfillment of self-actualization.

Many participants were able to articulate what could be described as experiences of psychological flow. Particularly in regards to racing and performing where there is a clear need to achieve some level of relative success, they described the need to channel their thoughts, emotions and expectations into a singular effort of focused behaviour and action. They express a need to concentrate fully on the task at hand, becoming absorbed in the moment, and use various sources of feedback to manage expectations and achieve realistic goals. While no two person’s experiences of flow are the same, there appear to be a number of similarities which characterize such a state.

Flow experiences require a clear understanding of the particular challenge being faced, be it a road race, a speed workout or a recovery/easy run. The challenge must be sufficiently difficult but not so that it is unachievable. Realistic goals and expectations based on one’s level of skill and competence must be set prior to undertaking the challenge. Participants use various sources of information (peers, prior results, training history) to influence their goals and expectations which are both challenging yet realistic and attainable. These are then weighed against the relative difficulty of the challenge at hand based on such things as the length of a race, temperature, course profile, etc. In either case, both the challenge itself and the necessary skills and competencies to
achieve them are sufficiently high. What results is a balance between the level of one’s ability/skill and the challenge. Participants express such an understanding in that each run, be it a race or training session, has clear goals and outcomes to be accomplished. As one participant says: “Every time I’m about to step out the door, I ask myself, ‘what is the purpose of this run?’ Unless I can clearly answer that question, there is no point in going any further” (Eric G). When racing, all participants articulate having goals, unique and subjective to the individual, but present nonetheless: “I always have three numbers in mind. The ‘A’ goal is the one I’d be most thrilled with but is also the most challenging. The ‘B’ goal is what I should reasonably expect to achieve if everything goes right. The ‘C’ goal is one which is only just acceptable but means that things did not go well. I almost always hit the ‘A’ or ‘B’ goal” (Tarah K). Perhaps needless to say, that all participants share a need for intense concentration and focus in order to succeed. This further involves ‘shutting out’ and completely ignoring any and every unrelated distraction and getting ‘in the zone.’

Flow experiences also seem to involve a distorted and inaccurate sense of time and a seeming loss of self-consciousness. One describes a 5km road race as seeming to "last forever and yet it was over in no time" (Simon B) while another suggests a marathon that took approximately three hours was "over as quickly as it began" (Rob W). Likewise, while often experienced in regards to racing/performing, others describe ‘flow experiences’ during training and preparation, specifically during long runs and hard workouts, as a feeling "effortless" or like "floating along" which many would be tempted to use to describe and support the infamous yet often elusive "runner’s high."
"Having a really good day" (Reid C) or "the perfect run" (Sheila R) are other ways that participants describe experiences of flow. Here, one almost absentmindedly 'exists' for the duration of the activity and simply "goes with the flow."

Many also express their shared ability to exert self-discipline and control over the situation. Many detailed a common intention to quit and give in when the pain and discomfort became too much: "I just wanted to stop so badly..." (Cam L) and "I kept telling myself to just stop" (Dayna P). Despite this, many are later unable to describe or recall such feeling states after the fact and refuse to give up: "...but somehow I managed to keep going" (Megan B) and "I did what I needed to do" (Dylan W).

Flow experiences are further enhanced by the immediate feedback which often occurs concomitantly or immediately afterwards. Feedback may come from the individuals perceived level of exertion (at times described as "effortless"), from some form of objective information (such as a time or pace split from a watch), or from others (be them competitors, supporters, or a coach). This information is internalized and used to influence one's actions/behaviours, such as to pick up the pace in a race, in order to optimize the chance of being successful. Being adaptive and flexible based on unanticipated events thus becomes a necessary skill. A ‘final’ feature of a flow experience is that the individual seems to be acting autonomously and doing something which is both inherently enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding: “When I’m racing and I’m running really well... there’s just nothing else like it on earth. It’s the greatest feeling in the world. I’m doing what I love to do and doing it exactly as I want too” (Reid C).
Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, and Nakamura (2005) have shown that flow is positively correlated with a higher subsequent motivation to perform and to perform well which suggests that it may act as a reinforcing agent for continued adherence to a particular activity or behaviour including as we have seen, to be physically active. Ultimately, the experience of psychological flow common to participants was perceived as positive and thus acts to motivate one to maintain their commitment and is itself a psychologically rewarding experience.

**Chapter 6: Discussion**

The findings of the current study suggest that participants were engaging in a subculture of distance running and a lifestyle of physical activity in order to fulfil, perhaps unconsciously, a number of human needs or desires including those for personal as well as collective, physical, psychological and social well-being. Many of these needs share close conceptual similarities to those proposed by Maslow (1954) in his 'Hierarchy of Human Needs' and more recently, by Deci and Ryan (2000) in their theory of self-determination.

Distance running was found to effectively meet the needs of participants to achieve competence, autonomy and relatedness as well as more 'basic' needs for physical health, fitness and well-being, social interaction and belongingness, self-esteem and confidence, and a sense of personal accomplishment. Ultimately, the activity appears to contribute to the fulfillment of self-actualization and reaching one's potential in distance running specifically and to the lives of participants more generally.
Furthermore, occasionally a number of running and racing experiences further provides participants with what appears to be experiences of psychological ‘flow.’ These findings are important in that they serve to confirm and support the prior work of others (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Maslow, 1954) in suggesting that all humans are driven (motivated) by the desire to fulfil basic or universal needs and wants, but also in that emphasizing and promoting the psychological and social benefits of such physical subcultures which may potentially be used to increase participation in physical activity, exercise and sport more generally. While such findings hint at the reasons why participants adopt and adhere to their physical activity routines; it does not explain how they do this or the process by which they are successful.

In order to better describe and understand the ‘process’ by which participants adopt and adhere to their running behaviours, physical activity was conceptualized as a form of ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 1982) in which participants were able to 1) persevere at the activity; 2) pursue a leisure ‘career’; 3) expend time and effort to gain skills and knowledge; 4) accrue durable benefits and special rewards; 5) participate in a unique ethos and social world; and 6) forge a unique personal and social identity. Ultimately, as I will argue running becomes a way of life and a lifestyle for its adherents and which appears to contribute to overall health and well-being through unique psychological and social rewards.
6.1 Running as Serious Leisure

Within the context of the current study, the involvement of all participants closely fits with Stebbins' (1982) concept of ‘serious leisure’ as well as Bryans’ (1977) idea of ‘recreational specialization,’ in that their dedication to running requires significant personal effort, commitment to training, perseverance, and is definitely sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for them, as committed participants, many of whom have developed a "long career in running" (Tulle, 2007: 239) and have acquired and expressed a combination of extensive knowledge, special skills and unique experiences.

“The serious leisure perspective” (SLP) is the name of the theoretical framework that bridges and synthesizes three main forms of leisure, known as serious leisure, casual leisure, and project-based leisure. Leisure is defined in the SLP as “un-coerced, contextually framed activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both; Stebbins, 2007: 4). It is the product of extensive exploratory and more or less systematic research (Stebbins, 2001) and has been described as a “formal grounded theory” (p. 108). According to the SLP, leisure is divided into three sub-categories: casual leisure; serious pursuits; and project based leisure. Serious pursuits are then divided into devotee work and serious leisure, which is further sub-divided into amateur, volunteer and hobbyist categories. Amateurs are found in art, science, sport, and entertainment, where they are inevitably linked, one way or another, with professional counterparts who coalesce, along with the public whom the two groups
share, into a three-way system of relations and relationships. By contrast, hobbyists lack
the professional alter ego of amateurs, although they sometimes have commercial
equivalents and often have small publics who take an interest in what they do. The
professionals are identified and defined in (economic rather than sociological) terms
that relate well to amateurs and hobbyists, namely, as workers who are dependent on
the income from an activity that other people pursue with little or no remuneration as
leisure (see Stebbins, 2007, pp. 6-8). Hobbyists are classified according to five
categories: 1) collectors, 2) makers and tinkerers, 3) activity participants (in non-
competitive, rule-based, pursuits such as fishing and barbershop singing), 4) players of
sports and games (in competitive, rule-based activities with no professional
counterparts like long-distance running and competitive swimming) and 5) the
enthusiasts of the liberal arts hobbies, which are primarily reading pursuits. Sport is
included both in the amateur category when there is a clear professional component
(team sports like baseball, hockey and football); and in the hobbyist category, when no
such elite/professional division exists (ultimate Frisbee, swimming, bowling). Stebbins’
research also clearly shows that amateurs, hobbyists and volunteers, like their casual
leisure cousins, do find a certain amount of pure fun and pleasure in what they do, even
if they view this reward as somewhat less important than other rewards.

Serious leisure is the steady pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or career volunteer
activity that captivates its participants with its complexity and many challenges. It is
profound, long-lasting, and invariably based on substantial skill, knowledge, or
experience, if not a combination of these three (Stebbins, 2001: 3). It also requires
perseverance to a greater of lesser degree. Casual leisure on the other hand is immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little to no special training. It is thus not surprising that this type of leisure is unlikely to produce meaningful satisfaction and a full experience. Serious leisure is known to provide a number of unique rewards for its participants most of which are highly personal such as fulfilling one's human potential, expressing one's skills and knowledge, having cherished experiences, and developing a valued identity (Stebbins, 2001). Serious leisure may even become what Dubin (1992) called a "central life interest" which he defines as "that part of the person's total life in which energies are invested in both physical/intellectual activities and in positive emotional states" (p. 41). This is certainly true for the participants in the study who claim that running is among their top priorities and is afforded a great deal of time and energy. Running has become an important part of the individuals’ identity and others come to know the participants as runners or as members of the running community. Thus, the potential that running can contribute to the fulfillment of human potential and self-actualization will be further explored using ‘serious leisure’ as a conceptual framework.

Recreational specialization is the name given to both the process and product of a progressive narrowing of interests within a complex leisure activity and shares with serious leisure the requirement for some combination of substantial skill, knowledge and experience. Bryan (1997) coined the term in his observational study of trout fishing where those who became immersed in the hobby of fishing soon came to specialize in that they chose to fish only certain species of fish; used only certain equipment (hooks,
flies, etc.); and fished in only certain locations. Later, recreational specialization was seen as a process of a progression of behaviour, skill and commitment that tends to become increasingly focused on a specialized domain of the activity, often accompanied by a growing emotional attachment to it (Scott & Schafer, 2001).

Serious leisure is distinguished from casual leisure by six characteristics found exclusively or in highly elaborated form only in the first. These characteristics are: 1) the need to persevere at the activity; 2) the availability of a leisure career; 3) the need to put in time and effort to gain skills and knowledge; 4) a realization of various special rewards and benefits; 5) a unique ethos and social world; and 6) an attractive personal and social identity. These characteristics will subsequently be applied to the current study and explored as possible explanations and understandings of participants committed exercise (running) behaviours as a way of life.

6.1.1 Perseverance

“It’s not always the end result that’s important; it’s the process of getting there. And so especially through running and having challenging goals, you really do build a lot of character and other skills which are transferable in other areas of life.” Eric G

Stebbins (2001) suggests that nearly every amateur, hobbyist, and volunteer must at times deal with tension and conflict, much of it which emerges over controversial goals, actions and policies or around alleged favouritism. Serious amateurs and hobbyists must also deal with such conflicts as stage fright, a need for intense and prolonged concentration, and the requirement for lengthy preparation and training.
Prior research has explored whether the progression from leisure to specialization can have a “dark side” (Bryan, 1977: 181) in which participants experience and must face various costs or negative outcomes. Stebbins (1992) highlighted ways in which serious leisure participants would at times incur various injuries, illness, experience poor performances, encounter cliques and disagreeable co-participants, and are continuously subjected to the drudgery of routine practice and rehearsals. Others have argued that specialization can produce family and work conflicts (Gillespie, Leffler & Lerner, 2002; Goff, Fick & Oppliger, 1997), eating disorders (Blaydon & Lindner, 2002), and addictive tendencies (Morgan, 1979). Running for the participants clearly comes with a number of costs (time, energy, money) which must be carefully balanced against the potential rewards. Costs, contradictions and risks associated with a high level of commitment are occasionally acknowledged by participants: “As with anything, of course there are risks!” (Dayna P) and “Let’s face it, running as much as I do is physically and mentally exhausting” (Simon B). However, more important than these ‘negative’ aspects of commitment, is the desire to continue and enjoy running long term: “…but despite all pain and discomfort and mental fatigue, it’s still something I’m going to do and something I love to do” (Eric G).

Perseverance is an essential component of commitment to distance running. There are inevitably times when one’s involvement in the activity is threatened, delayed and put on hold. In distance running there is illness, injury, burnout and staleness, and various other life commitments that take priority. Often times, these barriers are minor and temporary such as a week off running to take care of an injury or a missed workout
due to a family obligation. Other times they can be severe and long-lasting such as several weeks or months off due to serious illness or injury; and more commonly, changing life situations such as a new job, a lost job, divorce, marriage, the birth of a child, death of a relative, relocation, travel, etc. There is really no end to the list of potential barriers and obstacles that challenge one’s commitment to serious leisure and to physical activity in general (Trost et al., 2002). Perhaps not surprising is that the number one reason given for not engaging in adequate levels (if any) of exercise is a lack of time. Furthermore, the intense physical demands of the activity is also considered by many to be an obstacle which threatens continued behaviour in that participants become bored, tired and “fed-up” with running. These ‘costs’ for some participants will at some points become significantly uncontrollable, perhaps because it imbues in its practitioners the desire to engage in the activity beyond the time and money available to do so. It may then lead to accusations of selfishness.

Participants are easily able to articulate when and how running can become problematic at times (the “costs”) and how it becomes important to manage these conflicts:

“When I don’t exercise, I become really tired, my energy levels go down…I feel guilty, sluggish, fat, not good.” Megan B

“You have to be careful not to allow it to take over too much of your life.” Cam L

“If you take it too seriously and view the end result as a full 100% reflection of who you fully are…you have to understand it’s only part of your entire identity and who you are.” Simon B

“If you become obsessive about it and especially if you’re counting kilometres, you enter a negative space...” Dayna P
“It’s not your life; it’s just a part of your life. It’s not insignificant but it’s not 50% of your life, it shouldn’t be at least.” Eric C

Other conflicts that participants noted and which Cox and Orford (2004) referred to as ‘a price to pay’ included the time spent away from family, friends and social activities and occasional disagreements over running, decreased energy and extra (physical and mental) fatigue, injury and illness as well as perpetual aches, pain, and soreness from daily running and mileage, burnout, overtraining and staleness in which participants become bored, disinterested and apprehensive towards running and performance suffers, the financial costs of registering for races, travel to and from training and racing, and purchasing of gear, apparel and running accessories. Clearly these costs are not as salient as the rewards and benefits discussed previously, or else, running would not remain as salient and participation would likely cease. The salience of costs in relation to rewards must be continuously balanced but it seems obvious that the latter is more valued than the former and thus one perseveres through the occasional costs knowing and expecting that durable benefits and rewards will come.

Cox and Orford (2004) presented a conceptual category in their study of potentially addicted exercisers. They identified ‘scratching the itch’ as a circumstance where exercise behaviour was motivated and performed for the purpose of producing immediate pleasure and satisfaction or for catering to a short-term need that occurs during or immediately following the exercise behaviour. This included the 'buzz or high,' an elevated mood, dealing with or absolving anger or frustration, attaining satisfaction or a sense of achievement. It was compared to an addiction model whereby addicts perform drug taking or other behaviours to meet an immediate need for gratification.
and pleasure. Alien to this is the idea of a 'means to an end' or setting a specific goal to result in the long term. Far more predominant in the current study, participants continually refer to the long term goals or outcomes that motivate and sustain their behaviours: The desire to improve, to compete and to perform at the highest level possible. Some do mention occasions when running was seen as a chore, was unenjoyable or downright "horrible," (DP) yet were done due their importance in the long term, for "the big picture" (DW). There was admission of short-term and immediate benefits, but these were seen as complimentary and relatively less important than the big picture or long term goals. Coen and Ogles (1993) explored 'obligatory' exercise and found that obligatory runners trained more miles, days, hours/week, had faster finishing times, were more likely to continue running when injured, and reported higher levels of anxiety when not running. In the current study the same observations were made for highly committed runners and thus the use of the term 'obligatory' may have been incorrectly applied to those who displayed high levels of commitment and perseverance in running.

**6.1.2 A Leisure Career and Lifestyle**

Stebbins describes a leisure career as “shaped as it is by its own special contingencies, turning points and stages of achievement or involvement” (Stebbins, 2007: 11). Participants are likely to pass through four, possible five, career stages: beginning, development, establishment, maintenance and decline. The beginning may last as long as is necessary for invested interest in the activity to take hold. Development
is the more or less routine and systematic pursuit of the activity. Once the basics of the activity have been learned, one is considered established. Maintenance occurs once the leisure career is in full bloom and participants are able to fully enjoy the pursuit of the activity and have put behind them the uncertainties of getting established. Finally, a combination of physical and mental deterioration of skills is in some cases likely to lead to decline. This point of diminishing returns may lead to decreased fulfillment, boredom and a desire to seek new activity. In regard to developing a serious leisure ‘career’ it should be noted that all participants in the present study would be considered in the ‘maintenance’ stage in which they were achieving maximal rewards and benefits from their participation in the activity and were likely to continue their adherence in the long term. Many made mention of long term goals and distant events (races) in which they planned to participate: “Fukuoka [marathon] used to be it. I could retire after that race. But now it’s [Lake] Biwa [marathon]. I’ve got a few years to get there but I think it’s possible” (RC). At some point however, many participants are likely to experience decline, especially with diminishing physical skill and ability (such as with age) and may no longer find the activity fulfilling. Further research is needed to better understand those who may be experiencing this particular stage of a leisure career and what ultimately becomes of them.

In the context of running, a career is considered the entirety of one’s involvement in running which for some participants has only begun and for others in nearing the end. This career often begins in high school or university when one discovers some natural talent for running and so begins to train for track or cross-
country. Others discovered running later in life as a form of exercise or were encouraged by others to take it on such as when a co-worker or colleague suggested going for a run. Regardless of how one comes to initiate the activity, a leisure career begins by becoming knowledgeable about the activity and gaining as much information as possible. It is useful to find other more experienced individuals from whom the “inner workings” of the culture can be learned. Early it is important to absorb as many perspectives as possible, ask questions, conduct research (online, reading, watching, etc.) and become immersed in the culture. Eventually one develops the knowledge and skills necessary to advance in the activity and becomes increasingly incorporated and integrated into the culture.

Competition is an important aspect of the leisure career as it enables one as well as others, to gauge and rate one’s performance and progress in the activity. They may be considered a test of one’s dedication to training and symbolic of one’s success in their running career. This career also pertains to future plans and goals and the means in which one will get there. Some state a desire to attempt new distances or compete in different races. The running career is often judged by one’s performance in the marathon. Any discussion among runners will inevitably turn to this subject and often begins: “Have you ever run a marathon?” The next question is always the same: “How fast?” While the marathon is an important way to evaluate one’s running career, it is not the only way. One’s total length of involvement, their history of races, and their personal bests (PBs) are also used. A running career is not an easy one and is fraught with challenge and adversity. Injuries, declining performances, and a loss of interest can
eventually force a runner to “quit” and move on to other activities. As one participant brilliantly put it in an email to fellow training partners:

“If you want to win awards and recognition; running is probably not the activity to do it, regardless of distance or club. We are, in all honestly, just run of the mill dudes who work really hard for mediocre results, and this is how it will always be! I am here to try and get a little faster, achieve some running specific goals and generally have a good time, and so far I have done that and owe the lot of you, as well as the club a great deal of credit for that. And to be honest, that’s all I really want.” Simon B

A career may involve initial education, training, and preparation for several weeks, months, or even years. Performing, competing at races/events and testing one’s progress through competition becomes an essential “progress report” that provides important feedback and an indication of one’s success to date. A career also requires creating networks, contacts, and relationships with others; learning from others; and being a student/trainee/apprentice of those more experienced and knowledgeable. In time one is able to share ones’ own experience with others and become a teacher/educator/mentor. It’s about seeing one’s improvement, advancement as well as setbacks. It means changing, altering and adapting one’s focus, goals, and desired outcomes. It inevitably requires that one is evaluated and judged based on their experience (often their performances). Ultimately, one comes to the end of one’s career and may choose to ‘retire.’ One is no longer being challenged or rewarded by the activity and thus chooses to move on.
In summary, recreational road running, specifically within the context of a competitive and committed running club, clearly fits into the lexicon of a serious leisure pursuit in that participants indicate their running takes on a life of its own and becomes a pillar of their existence.

6.1.3 Skills and knowledge

Running is a means to accomplish the desire/need to be competent and excel at an activity, to achieve mastery. To acquire the knowledge and skills that allow for a thorough understanding, appreciation and ability to perform and excel. This involves educating oneself on the many aspects of running which includes: Reading books, magazines, interviews, blogs, and online content; watching documentaries, movies, video clips, interviews, YouTube videos, etc.; talking and listening to others, especially coaches, trainers, and athletes; discussing with family, friends and peers; learning the lingo; familiarizing oneself with the elite/professional scene, the top races and places and latest news pertaining to the sport. There is also the practical aspect of running itself, doing supplemental training; stretching and core exercise; flexibility; the psychological aspect of the sport (visualization, affect management, goal setting); practicing race day tactics; nutrition and fuelling; racing and competing; etc.

Mannell (1993) proposed that competence and deep involvement are common elements that underlie specialization, commitment and serious leisure. Mannell noted, “Activities that require an investment of effort are seen to provide opportunities to maintain and further develop the sense of competence and allow people to frequently
experience enjoyment and develop positive feelings about themselves” (p. 134). Lee and Scott (2006) were able to link various benefits and costs to specific dimensions of specializations (i.e., behaviour, skills and knowledge, and commitment) and the leadership roles people assume within leisure social worlds. Additionally, the study may provide insight into the relative benefits and costs of progression. Results were consistent with Stebbins (2000) in suggesting that the benefits people experience as a result of specialization outweigh the costs they encounter. Ultimately this area of inquiry may provide researchers and practitioners a better understanding of issues related to the recruitment, retention, and burnout of leaders and other participants within different leisure activity systems.

For many, the desire to excel at the chosen activity, mastery, was a key motivating factor. Running is about more than participation and performance, but becomes a process of continuously educating oneself on all the various elements that may lead to success. It is about the constant pursuit of excellence and improvement, often via small and gradual steps and which requires the identification and development of relevant skills and knowledge.

### 6.1.4 Special rewards and durable benefits

“Running is almost the goal unto itself... sure I want to run a marathon, but the means to getting out the door and being out there and running...is the target. I enjoy it enough that just getting out there and doing it, is very satisfying.” Rob W
Stebbins spoke of serious leisure as a means of accruing various durable benefits, often highly unique to the leisure activity. In addition, there are a number of rewards which are considered the routine values which attract and maintain enthusiasts. These rewards are not only fulfilling in themselves but also act as counterweights to the costs (tensions, dislikes and disappointments) encountered in the activity. The drive to find fulfillment in serious leisure is the drive to experience the rewards and thus becomes a source of continued motivation for engaging in it. This motivational concept of reward distinguishes it from the durable benefits which emphasize outcome. Serious leisure is not meant to be hedonic, but is motivated by the following ten substantial rewards (Stebbins, 2007: pp. 13–15):

**Personal rewards**

1. Personal enrichment (cherished experiences)
2. Self-actualization (developing skills, abilities, knowledge)
3. Self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge already developed)
4. Self-image (known to others as a particular kind of serious leisure participant)
5. Self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep satisfaction — fun, flow)
6. Re-creation (regeneration) of oneself through serious leisure after a day’s work
7. Financial return (from a serious leisure activity)

**Social rewards**

8. Social attraction (associating with other serious leisure participants, with clients as a volunteer, participating in the social world of the activity)
9. Group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project; senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic)

10. Contribution to the maintenance and development of the group (including senses of helping, being needed, being altruistic in making the contribution)

In addition to these rewards which are afforded various importances relative to each other, there are also eight durable benefits which share several commonalities with the aforementioned rewards. In terms of the current study, it became clear that participants were accruing such benefits, some of which are particularly unique to distance running. They are summarized as follows:

1) Lasting physical products: superior physical health and fitness, longevity, socially valued physical appearance (thin, lean, attractive)

2) Enhancement of self-image: control over the body, nutrition and diet, body image and esteem, confidence and self-efficacy

3) Self-actualization: self-fulfilment, reaching one’s potential, being the best one can be, being autonomous

4) Self-enrichment: self-improvement, striving for personal excellence, excelling

5) Social interaction and belongingness: relatedness, acceptance, praise, reward and recognition, social health and well-being

6) Feelings of accomplishment: personal satisfaction, being seen as competent, masterful

7) Self-expression: identity formation
8) Recreation or renewal of self: mood enhancement, stress management, reduced anxiety and depression

The first two benefits (lasting physical products and enhanced self-image) were combined into a category called the ‘running body.’ According to Shipway and Holloway (2010) the creation and maintenance of the “running body” is deemed an important part of society in general and running in particular which can have significant impact on one’s self-worth and self-esteem. Over time, the continued dedication to routine training, along with a careful and close attention paid to diet and nutrition, will gradually mould most bodies into a shape which is uniquely specialized for the sport of running. This running body which is accurately stereotyped as lean, slender, and thin is constantly modified and adapted in subtle ways to maximize performance and efficiency. The process of achieving this prized body is what Shilling (2003) would describe as a ‘body project’ and something which comes to be seen as an investment. Smith (2000) elaborated upon this and suggests that such projects are worked at through conscious management, maintenance and moulding. In contrast to the growing prevalence of sedentary and overweight bodies that we have become accustomed to seeing each day; the thin and fit running body carries symbolic value and represents abstract qualities like commitment, control, discipline, determination, hard-work, personal and social responsibility and an investment in health. Health is now considered closely related to bodily aesthetics. Abbas (2004) draws on the work of Bourdieu (1993) and suggests that distance running is a means of developing a slim and muscular working body which is a source of ‘bodily capital’ acquired through leisure but
important in the workplace and larger social settings. The slim and symbolically
controlled/disciplined body, however, also resonates with triathletes embedded in the
sedentary and over-weight Canadian middle classes (Atkinson, 2008). As Smith-Maguire
(2007) notes, a fit and flexible body exuding high pain thresholds owns a definitive
middle-class exchange value in the current North American health-risk culture. Elias’s
(2002) figurational approach reminds us that the thin (i.e. contained, restrained and
emotionally controlled) body carries tremendous cultural value as a marker of
distinction over the course of civilising process. The thin and fit triathlon body becomes
a symbolic representation, especially during a time when bodies appear to be culturally
de-civilised, of what ‘everyone else’ is not: dedicated, controlled, disciplined, culturally
and economically invested in health and self-responsible. Some consider the pursuit of
leisure, particularly running, as a principle motivator of meeting the socially constructed
norms pertaining to body image. However, most of the participants when questioned
about the importance of body image and appearance simply suggested that maintaining
a skinny and slender frame was purely for the sake of running faster and performing
better and were quick to discount any potential societal benefits: “The only reason to
lose weight is now to get faster.” (Megan B)

A number of benefits have been grouped together due to their conceptual
similarities: self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, and feelings of
accomplishment. Self-actualization was first introduced by Kurt Goldstein to describe
the human motivation to realize one's full potential. He viewed this as an individual’s
chief motive, and the only real motive: "the tendency to actualize itself as fully as
possible is the basic drive...the drive of self-actualization" (Modell, 1993: 44). Carl Rogers similarly wrote of "the curative force in psychotherapy - man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities...to express and activate all the capacities of the organism" (Rogers, 1961: 350). However, it was Abraham Maslow who is responsible for bringing the concept most fully to prominence in describing his hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954). There, self-actualization creates the final level of psychological development that can only be achieved when all basic and mental needs are fulfilled and the "actualization" of the full personal potential takes place. In 'A Theory of Human Motivation,' Maslow (1943) explicitly defines self-actualization to be "the desire for self-fulfillment, namely the tendency for him [the individual] to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming." For Goldstein, self-actualization was a motive and, for Maslow, a level of development; for both, however, roughly the same kinds of qualities were expressed: independence, autonomy, a tendency to form few but deep friendships, a "philosophical" sense of humour, a tendency to resist outside pressures and a general transcendence of the environment rather than "coping" with it (Reber, 1995). While other, older psychological approaches, such as Freud's psychodynamic approach which focused on unhealthy individuals displaying dysfunctional behaviours, the humanistic approach espoused by Rogers and Maslow, focuses on healthy, adaptive and motivated individuals and samples and tried to understand and describe how they define the self while maximizing their potential (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The current study
used a similar approach and studied a sample of healthy, physically active individuals in order to better understand their ‘social world’ and the ways they adaptively and successfully incorporate positive and healthy behaviours such as PA into their lives.

In the current context, self-actualization was mentioned both explicitly and also more subtly. When questioned about the priority of running to his life, one participant noted: "I think it goes hand and hand with it... I think it's part of self actualization. So it's at the higher end of Maslows pyramid" (Reid C). He also mentioned that there were times when "I get caught up in the higher end stuff and let the bottom things slip." Here we see that running is providing something that cannot fully be explained and certainly not quantified: A sense of personal satisfaction and gratification one gets when doing something well. The integrity of doing the very best one possibly can and being responsible and accountable for the outcome. Striving to be all one can be in the context of their chosen activity. Ultimately, self-actualization comes from within. It is rewarded intrinsically and does not rely on others for validation. It is closely related to the motivational needs for competence and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1995) and the desire to achieve mastery. Participants establish and set out to accomplish their running related goals as individuals and their successes are largely personal. They share in their desire to improve despite no external pressures to do so, rather they are motivated by an inherent and internal drive/force to do better: “Running becomes a way for people to add meaning to their lives” (Cam L).

Cox and Orford (2004) noted a number of 'pay offs' that were considered positive experiences with exercise which both reinforced exercise and were also used by
participants as justification for continued and increased involvement. These pay offs were mostly viewed as long-term goals relating to physical and psychological health and well-being, although some short term benefits were also noted. The idea of exercising control over the body both by using the body effectively and also by using exercise to provide routine and structure were considered a pay off as was 'creating a shape.' Furthermore, enduring and long-term effects such as improved health, fitness, confidence and general well-being were mentioned along with short-term, immediate effects in the form of a 'buzz' or 'high,' feelings of satisfaction and improved mood. Participants in the current study stress the value of continued improvement, of getting faster with continued training and becoming an overall better runner as the most important benefit of exercise while also making note of the many other valuable, but less emphasized, effects such as better quality sleep, feeling invigorated, being able to concentrate and be more effective at work, and "lowered heart rate, good blood pressure, cholesterol, hormones and all that physiological crap" (Matt L). Less so than in other more general exercisers, health and well-being are not considered as particularly important to serious runners who acknowledge that they are already healthy and would be so even with much less exercise than they currently do. Their goal is not improved health and well-being, rather it is sport-specific competence and success (mastery).

Recreation or renewal of self can refer to the subjective experiences that occur before, during and after a run or training session. This includes: mood enhancement, stress management, and decreased anxiety and depression. The following quotes
highlight ways in which running contributes to psychological and emotional health and well-being:

“There is some sort of serenity that is imposed post-run.” Megan B

“I don’t do it intentionally, but it just happens. Ya, it definitely happens. I definitely feel better. If I’m stressed out and I go for a run or things aren’t great at home, things are better after a run.” Eric G

“I’m exhausted but I’m kinda elated at the same time.” Rob W

“It calms me down; other times, it sorta energizes me. Lifts me up.” Matt L

“I do know that, like generally, you feel a state of calm and I definitely do notice that after a run. I find it easy to organize my thoughts and plan...” Dayna P

“I get positive effects. I feel great after. But never do it for that reason alone.” Tara K

“It also provides me with a sense of clarity, serenity and peace of mind; it’s a holistic activity that brings together the body and the mind.” Dylan W

“Running keeps me grounded and gives me much greater perspective on all aspects of my life.” Cam L

“...channels my energy and drive toward an all-round healthy lifestyle.” Sheila R

“...it makes my head clear and my spirit soar.” Simon B

Not surprisingly, Szabo et al. (1998) reported that runners reported less anxiety and better mood on days when they ran in contrast to non-running days.

6.1.5 Unique ethos and social world

“I would say that it’s an inarguable fact that daily exercise or at least patterned, habitual exercise is important to live a physically and emotionally healthy lifestyle. And maybe this is a faith based thing, not like religious faith, but like belief in an idea. I have
One of the principle attractions of many serious leisure activities which may occur instantly upon initiation of the behaviour or evolve and come later is the sense of being part of a bustling, fascinating, and all-encompassing social world. Stebbins (2001) states that the social world associated with a given serious leisure activity is particularly attractive for its organizational richness, notably its shared goals, problems, values, experiences, and costs and rewards. All participants have a tendency to experience these shared circumstances and which provides them with common ground for conversing, interacting and building relationships and togetherness. Running exists as a physical/sport (sub)culture which includes special beliefs, values, moral principles, norms, performance standards, unwritten rules and etiquette as well as lingo, jargon, terms and phrases (a running language): “[Running] is a simple pleasure, but it’s not an easy pleasure, because it is in and of itself not an easy activity. It’s rigorous, it can be uncomfortable, it’s very difficult to master. It’s very difficult to learn how to run correctly.” Sheila R

Regardless of ones abilities, all runners are connected to each other and contribute to the overall community. This community consists of elite, sub-elite, amateur, recreational, and participant runners which exist as a spectrum or continuum. Running is both an inclusive (“anyone can run”) but at times exclusive environment based on the importance of competition. There exists a large population of participants with a range of abilities/talent and who possess different goals and desires. Recently,
there has been an explosion in the popularity of running as a means of becoming
healthy and fit; and for becoming engaged in fundraising and charity causes with a
multitude of races, events, and expos existing for this reason. Within any given city
there exist various running clubs, groups, and organizations with various roles and
responsibilities.

While the running club of interest was composed of over 150 members, there is
also a great deal of interaction with the larger running community. This occurs during
the participation in races, relays, charity events and volunteering opportunities. The
running club also organizes and hosts a local running race each year which involves the
coordination of the entire club membership in various volunteer roles. Over time,
running within the group has given participants a means of being accepted and
integrated into the group. They develop meaningful friendships and relationships with
other club members and are both dependent and accountable to others. This becomes a
new means of motivating individuals to train and perform at a particular level knowing
that important others will have expectations of them: “I’m not going to let the group
down.” (Tarah K). They are recognized and congratulated for their achievements and are
given advice, suggestions and feedback. Atkinson (2008) suggests that the triathlon
community, much like the running community, provides social comfort and stability for
people who are habitually seeking consistency, predictability, commitment and
direction in their lives. Participants share preferences for personal goal-setting, attribute
a degree of moral worth to health and vibrancy, preach self-responsibility and reliance
and approach embodied performance with measured rationality. Their personal and
collective quests through triathlon are unintended outcomes of long-term civilising processes, and their collective perception of contemporary de-civilising processes, in countries such as Canada. Atkinson shows how triathlon provides a classic ‘controlled decontrolling of emotional controls’ (Elias & Dunning, 1986) wherein fatigue, fear, doubt, exuberance, determination, suffering and resolve converge. In the literature on subcultures, Maffesoli (1996) contends that contemporary subcultural communities are emotion-centred and tactile groups. Athletes may grimace or even come to tears in the process of training or competition, and the tension involved in trying to endure (and perhaps to win) creates a mutually recognised sense of exciting significance within the sport. Many runners begin to circulate within smaller groups of like-minded and similarly skilled runners and this becomes a sub-culture within the larger running group and community as a whole: “…strategies and talk about running comes through as important” (Megan B). It is here where the competitive and serious nature of highly committed participants comes through most strikingly and is differentiated from the casual runner. Participants are labelled as ‘elitist’ due to their commitment to competition and performance: “[Others] aren’t interested in making running a No. 1 life priority, and that’s totally fine. We are fundamentally different guys. We do make it a priority and are willing to shuffle our schedules around in order to follow an intense training schedule, and also in order to match up tough workouts with our differing schedules, just so we can train together.” Matt L
They are highly knowledgeable about the sport and all its various facets. They follow and support the sport at its elite/professional level and become fascinated and engrossed by this.

Running races from those run on the track to road events like the half and full marathon have become popular and ever growing events that attract hundreds to thousands of participants every year. Such events test the mental and physical training of recreational and elite runners alike at a local, national and international level. They have become a major source of revenue for cities and many also have a large charitable aspect. While many participants are simply there to finish or take part, this is where a small minority of serious runners, including all of the current participants, test and showcase their many weeks and months of training. Serious runners exist as a small but important minority within the greater running community. They are aware and knowledgeable of other runners, other clubs and their respective times and activities. These runners come together at large events and often communicate and interact prior to and following a race or team relay. They are friendly, cordial and discuss past results, training programs and future intentions. They also compete fiercely among each other during races and create rivalries and personal competitions. The divide between serious competitive runners and those taking part in the sport for health promotion and charity fundraising seems to be growing. Ogles, Masters and Richardson (1995) explored the motives of competitive runners and found that obligatory runners were disproportionately male and endorsed achievement and success motives for running.
when compared to recreational runners who more heavily endorsed general health and physical well-being.

Running may indeed be undergoing a de-sportification process in which it’s competitive and historical roots are being eliminated in favour of overall participation and championing a healthy lifestyle. Or perhaps more accurately, it is simply a re-sportification process as the nature of the sport naturally changes due to the new and often competing interests of its participants, organizations and larger consumer-oriented corporations. While few would argue the merits of increased participation in an activity which is providing numerous contributions to individual health and well-being at all levels; committed participants and groups like those explored in the current study may face marginalization in that their competitive spirits and pursuit of increased competence may be compromised by the growing majority of ‘fun’ and ‘charity’ runners.

Meritocracy becomes an important emerging theme that many participants value as an inherent and important part of running: “You can’t be disappointed if you don’t put in the work and you don’t get out the result you want” (Eric G). It then becomes apparent that certain types of runners are seen as being more competent and masterful than others as a hierarchy is established: “It’s also a superiority thing, you create a hierarchy. You see yourself as being better than people who don’t exercise, all that sort of thing” (Reid C).
6.1.6 Personal and social identity

“I run because I am a runner.” (Dylan W)

Although not explored in any great depth in the current study, the personal and social identity forged through participation in running was often apparent and expressed by participants in various ways. Individualism has been used to describe a change in sporting and leisure participation with a focus on mental and physical wellbeing, flexible time frames and multiple commitments. Arai and Pedlar (2003) present Borgmann’s (1992) notion of ‘leisure as shared meaning’ as a way to shift this individualistic focus to one in which leisure is not seen as a commercial good, but rather something that everyone shares. In this sense, leisure becomes a form of celebration and extending towards Maffesoli’s (1996) concept of the ‘neo-tribe’, may better explain some emerging forms of serious leisure that are a step down from formalized club structures, and yet retain a sociability that is distinguished by shared perspectives, language, ritual, dress and the espousing of common values. Despite the growing popularity of recreational running generally and ever increasing participation in running events and racing, serious committed runners continue to make up a small and shrinking minority of the larger running community. They are clearly differentiated from the other runners by their competitive orientation and commitment to performance, their superior knowledge of the sport, their dedication to their own training and often to others, their perseverance through single sessions and entire seasons of running, their investment in the sport and their identity as runners. It could be argued that many
running participants have now distanced themselves from pure competitive values to place greater emphasis on the sharing of emotion in which the activity is seen as fun.

Group solidarity is actualized through initiatory rituals, the wearing of specific styles of dress and adornment (clothing brands, gear, shoes), and the shared values of the group. Participation alone is not a stable source of meaning and belonging due to the multiplicity of groups to which people can belong (within the geographic area of Toronto, there are dozens of groups who regularly meet to run and socialize), but participation is nonetheless primarily built around a notion of accepting a context and joining a whole for the purpose of being with others. The current context just happens to value performance, competition and self-improvement.

In summary, we see that all participants adhere to a particular form of serious leisure and recreational specialization and are displaying the six fundamental features of the conceptual framework that Stebbins (1992) proposed including the desire and need to persevere at the activity, to expend time and effort to gain skills and knowledge, to embark and succeed at a leisure ‘career,’ to accrue durable benefits and special rewards, to participate in a unique social world and ethos, and to forge a personal and social identity. This impacts the participants’ cognitions and thinking, their emotions and feelings as well as their actions and behaviours. Taken together, the activity of running and its plethora of facets provide a substantial source of meaning, value and significance which contribute to physical, psychological and social health and well-being.
6.2 Motivation and Achievement Orientation

While not the focus or a purpose of the current study, participants were able to contribute to the exploration of the specific motivations that fueled their commitment and adherence and which became clearly associated with the ‘meaning’ of their behaviours. Participants display a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations which may differ given various contexts. One participant puts it this way: “People are attracted to things they are good at. You gain praise, you have successes, it comes perhaps easier to you than to your peers... and so you feel good at it, you feel good about doing it” (Ryan H). This statement implies that the motivation to run comes both externally and internally and results in the simple emotion of “feeling good.” Setting a new personal best, competing at a new distance, or running a certain weekly mileage are based on personal expectations, goals and success and represent intrinsic motivation to be competent and master the activity. Winning an age group award, being the first club member to finish a race or trying to beat a training partner or rival are examples of extrinsic motivations. This is closely related to the concept of achievement orientation. Achievement orientation refers to the ways in which individuals frame and define success in a variety of contexts (Hanrahan & Biddle, 2002). This is sometimes also referred to as motivational and competitive orientation especially when looking at the context of sport and exercise (Gill, Kelley, Martin, & Caruso, 1991). This area of research has been particularly useful when applied to sport psychology where it has important implications for high-level performance and elite athletes. The motivations which drive improved performance and better outcomes will be highly valuable to understanding
the individual athletes as well as the larger physical cultures in which they exist. This understanding can then be evaluated, tested and applied by psychologists, coaches, trainers, medical staff, management and of course by the athletes themselves.

Research collected over the past decades suggests there are two distinct achievement orientations common among athletes and in sport. While numerous terms have been used to describe these orientations, Nicholls (1984) conceptualization of achievement motivation will be used to articulate these distinct concepts. Ego orientations reflects a strong desire to win events, races, and competitions; rank and place high in one’s gender and age group if not overall; and outperform fellow competitors. Ego has also been referred to as outcome, win and performance orientation and is predominantly interested in one's success relative to others (Vealey, 1986). Task orientation refers to placing a high salience on doing one's best; working to improve personal bests and outcomes; and performing well, relative to one's own ability (Nicholls, 1984). This is also known as performance, goal and mastery orientation and is related to achievement striving and overall enjoyment in sport. Depending on one's achievement orientation, a specific event may be differentially interpreted as successful or not. When task orientation is emphasized, athletes are more likely to develop the mindset and techniques that will enhance confidence, satisfaction, and achievement in sport. When ego orientation is stressed, this puts a greater amount of pressure on the individual to succeed in relation to competition which can cause undue anxiety. Setting realistic goals may have important implications for regulating stress and anxiety prior to and during a competition and thus impact performance. Hall, Kerr and Matthews (1998)
found that perfectionism and ego orientation were significant predictors of cognitive anxiety; while perceived ability and task orientation were predictors of confidence.

Furthermore, Roberts (1986) argued that athletes displaying high task and low ego orientation view achievement in self-referent terms and thus are at lower risk of experiencing state anxiety and able to perform better. Both ego and task orientations are integral to success in running but are often present at different times and situations. Task orientation was generally considered more important to participants who set their own personal goals and expectations. Occasionally however, the opportunity to outperform key rivals and peers elevates the importance of ego orientation which becomes prioritized and valued.

In a study of the motivations of elite Kenyan runners, Onywera et al. (2006) found that these athletes were primarily motivated by economic incentives, followed by talent and tradition. Such findings would not be expected in recreational runners who stand little chance of winning. Rather, intrinsic motivations may often be more salient and promote prolonger adherence and enjoyment of the activity. However, training with a group adds a unique form of extrinsic motivation as it creates a sense of accountability to the group to support each other and also promotes competition amongst peers and a desire to beat important others. Important others could be a coach, a rival age-group runner or a similarly talented training partner. There is also extrinsic motivation to represent the club and be recognized for one's accomplishments. Ogles and Masters (2003) showed that a group of marathon runners could be divided into a number of groups based on their motivation profiles. These profiles included:
Running enthusiasts, lifestyle managers, personal goal achievers, personal
accomplishers, and competitive achievers. In another study of 40 committed male
runners who ran on average for 10.8 years and ran 42.5 miles/week, Thornton and Scott
(1995) found that 77% of the sample reported high levels of commitment to running.
Mastery, competition, weight-regulation, health-related reasons and fitness were given
as personal incentives. Mastery and social recognition were positive predictors of
running commitment. In a study of 292 individuals divided into sedentary individuals,
fitness level runners, high volume recreational runners and high volume marathon
runners, Breheny (2002) found that runners, regardless of their level of involvement in
the sport, demonstrate greater needs for mastery and competitiveness, and that high
volume runners report greater intrinsic motivation, which is positively correlated with
length of involvement in the sport of running. Such studies seem to indicate that
runners' motivations can vary and differ based on such things as their level of ability,
goals, age and experience.

It seems apparent that participants adopt a unique combination of intrinsic and
extrinsic motivations which fuel and sustain their behaviours. They are intrinsically
motivated to master the activity, persevere through adversity, create and solidify a
personal identity and improve their skills and knowledge. Extrinsically they are
motivated to pursue a leisure 'career,' contribute to the harmony and success of their
social group and world, and forge a social identity where ones achievements and efforts
are nurtured, supported, normalized, and recognized. Whether extrinsic or intrinsic
motives play a predominant role in regulating one's behaviour seem to be time and
context specific. During relays and team events, the desire to succeed for the collective and “not let the others down” (Rob W) is a significant motivator. Other times, running a PB in a goal race will be the primary (intrinsic) motivator. During tough workouts, individuals push one another to achieve the numbers which many admit would not be possible if running alone. The collective group is necessary for doing what is needed to ultimately achieve individual goals; if not necessary, certainly aids in this. Murcia et al. (2008) found that when SDT was applied to an exercise setting, a motivational climate, in which peers were supportive and emphasized cooperation, effort and personal improvement, was effective in predicting the three basic needs (competence, autonomy and relatedness) and thus self-determined motivation. The resulting self-determination also positively influenced the experienced level of enjoyment during exercise.

An understanding of the motivations that initiate, maintain and sustain running behaviour, especially long term, will have important implications for the promotion of physical activity more generally and specifically to running. While it seems that individuals display a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations at various times; those who ascribe their commitment to running as based on personal and internal reasons such as for enjoyment, to challenge and better oneself, for health and fitness, for general well-being, and for the pursuit of mastery, seem to be more likely to maintain their behaviours in the long term. The group or club environment also appears to be essentially for long-term commitment and enjoyment of running as like-minded
individuals with similar goals and shared experiences come together in a community of belonging, acceptance and recognition

6.3 Strengths, Limitations & Future Directions

The current study has its fair share of both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of the study were its ethnographic approach to qualitative research and the overall length of the study. For 12 months, research was conducted to intimately explore the ‘lived experiences’ of participants both as individuals as well as in their social environment. As a highly committed runner himself, the researcher was able to successfully integrate himself into the social world of distance running and interact with participants in a meaningful way which served to validate the legitimacy of the findings and the subjective ‘truths’ of this particular sample. Using various qualitative methods as opposed to a singular one, also served to avoid and minimize the weakness of any one particular method used alone. Thus observation and field notes were validated by the use of interviews, both formal and informal, and both with individuals as well as with the larger social group. Personal reflection was constantly called upon to assess the researcher’s own perceptions and biases which were then openly discussed with participants. What resulted was a rich and detailed account of the cognitions, emotions and behaviours of the participants and a better understanding of the meaning and significance of running to their lives. Additional strengths include a mixed sample composed of both male and female participants ranging in age from 22 to 52 years. While only distance running was explored, it is perhaps likely that findings could also
apply to other endurance activities such as triathlon and cycling, both which claim large followings of committed adherents. Finally, the focus on favourable and socially-desirable behaviours and a lifestyle of physical activity/sport is a strength in that it highlights a minority of the population who routinely commit and adhere to physical activity and for whom it has become an important and valuable part of their lives.

There were however a number of limitations or weaknesses pertinent to the design and analysis of the current study. The first is the relatively small and homogenous sample size. While the ethnography was initially interested in the running group as a whole and which included 150 or so individuals, it soon became clear that only a small subset of the larger club membership would be considered in order to address the current research question more intimately. In the end, a dozen or so highly committed and competitive runners were followed in great depth for a prolonged period of time and their contributions make up the majority of the data which influenced the findings and discussion. This group of participants were however well representative of highly committed and competitive recreational runners who were most likely to accurately lend meaningful insight into the research question and purpose. Nevertheless, given the relatively small size and lack of demographic diversity represented by the group, findings should not be generalized beyond this population. There could however be transferability to other sports, activities and leisure pursuits, particularly those involving endurance activities. It is also important to note the heavy analytic role of the researcher in conducting data collection, analysis and representation. It cannot be said with any certainly whether another investigator would
not have found different or contrasting findings if conducting a similar investigation. This challenges the internal validity of the findings and questions whether the current research was indeed exploring the ‘true’ meaning of commitment and adherence to distance running. One could also question the external validity in extrapolating findings to other groups of committed runners and those in other activities. Given the lack of diversity within the group and relatively advantaged and privileged backgrounds of a majority of participants, current findings should only be seen to apply to similar groups and populations and not extrapolated further.

Future research should seek to explore a more diverse group of participants with differing perspectives and social and cultural backgrounds. Research, specifically of a qualitative and ethnographic nature, should also investigate whether current findings apply to different physical activities, physical and sport cultures as well as other examples of serious leisure pursuits. Applying ‘needs’ theory and self-determination theory to other populations is also an area of future investigation as is expanding upon the current study to explore in greater depth some of the current findings.

6.4 Implications

There are a number of potential impacts and outcomes which follow from the current study.

The first is a rich and detailed description of a small sample of highly committed and adherent physically active individuals. This includes the daily activities, the cognitions, emotions and behaviours of those who successfully incorporate physical
activity into their lives and represent a small minority of the population. In order to promote and participate in more healthy lifestyles including those incorporating routine physical activity, we must first have a greater appreciation and understanding of what such lifestyles in fact look like. Being able to determine and describe a healthy lifestyle will be the first step in predicting and intervening. This study thus serves as an example of ‘positive psychology,’ the study of healthy and successful populations.

A further implication is that the current study builds upon, confirms and supports the prior work of others who have sought to propose that human beings are driven or motivated by basic or universal human needs. Maslow (1954), Rogers (1961) and Deci and Ryan (2002) more recently, have suggested that various activities and behaviours serve to fulfil a number of physical, psychological and social needs or wants. The current study has done this using distance running specifically and physical activity generally as a ‘case study’ to support this notion. This then has further theoretical implications for understanding and explaining various human behaviours and the motivations that drive them.

Furthermore, the qualitative and ethnographic exploration into the ‘lived experiences’ of physical cultures such as the one in the present study, have enormous potential to provide a rich and detailed account of the many physical, psychological and social benefits that participation in such a culture entails. It showcases and highlights the importance of a healthy active lifestyle and details the ways in which this is achieved and maintained and the benefits it provides. This may lead to behavioural interventions, strategies and programs which can promote participation in such cultures and also the
information needed to locate, infiltrate and integrate into such sub-cultures. Stressing the importance of social and psychological rewards that result from physical activity commitment, the value of the group/club to create a sense of community and belonging as well as the importance of competition and self-improvement for lasting and enjoyable adherence to physical activity will be essential. This information could potentially aid in policy development, program implementation and educational tools which will inform and guide future physical activity promotion and participation.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusions

The current study sought to describe and explain both why and how a small group of recreational runners were able to successfully commit to a lifestyle of physical activity by exploring the meaning, value and significance of distance running to their lives. The ways in which one becomes engaged in a high level of physical activity, how and why commitment was maintained in the short and long term, as well as the subjective costs and rewards of adherence were described, discussed and explained. To do this, the study employed ethnographic and qualitative methods by exploring the "lived experience" of a select group of recreational, yet highly committed runners who belonged to a local running group. Participant observation, formal and informal interviews and discussions as well as text analysis were used to interpret and assess the meaning, value and significance of running to participants' lives and how their adherence and commitment to running impacted their cognitions, emotions and behaviours.
All of the participants would regularly engage in a high volume of exercise when compared to national recommendations of 150min per week (Colley et al., 2011) and all expressed a stable desire to maintain this ‘lifestyle’ in the long-term. Key findings suggest that participants commit to distance running as an effective means of fulfilling a number of human needs and desires which also serve to provide physical, psychological and social rewards. Participants also belonged and were accepted into a group which contributed to a sense of belonging and contribution as well as rewarded them with recognition, support and a group identity. Ultimately, a commitment to running appeared to enhance and improve their lives in various way including helping them meet specific goals and create and provide personal and subjective meaning and significance. Despite the occasional contradictions to their running behaviours, participants were making informed and rational choices to exercise to the extent that they did with the opportunity to meet certain goals and needs. These needs relate to a desire for mastery and competence, for autonomy, for continuous self-improvement and betterment, for competition, and for social interaction, belongingness and relatedness. It was argued that collectively, participants were using distance running and a lifestyle of physical activity to achieve some personal level of self-actualization and fulfil their human potential both in running specifically as well as in their lives more generally. The rewards and benefits of running were consistent for all participants and were considered to highly outweigh the potential negative consequences or costs of their behaviours which included immense physical and mental effort, the expense of
time and resources, and complex emotional states of disappointment, frustration and anger.

Once participants had made the conscious decision to engage in a high commitment to running as a form of serious leisure and for the aforementioned desire to meet certain needs and wants, they were constantly validated with a sense of accomplishment, recognition and satisfaction. They expressed a desire to persevere both short- and long-term through obstacles and barriers which itself (perseverance) became a salient goal that can only be achieved through continued dedication to their activity in the long-term. Participants sought to acquire a unique set of skills and knowledge in the pursuit to master the competence to perform and compete to the best of one’s ability. They were rewarded with unique benefits such as self-enrichment, self-expression, lasting physical benefits, self-renewal and regeneration, satisfaction, gratification and many more. They were also fulfilling a higher order need to become self-actualized and to be all that they could be thus fulfilling their human potential. Their behaviours also led to the development of a cherished personal and social identity that develops over time and further validated and motivates their commitment to running. Finally, running provides participation in a social world and ethos that continues to grow and provides unique opportunities for psychological and social development. Ultimately, participants furthered and advanced their running ‘career’ by gaining relevant experience and rewards. What results is an entire lifestyle based on leisure and which is seemingly both healthy and adaptive. Similar to the findings of Sachs and Pargman (1979), it was found that for participants, running was a significant and important part
of their lives, was an efficient way to maintain health, and elicited feelings of relaxation and accomplishment.

A high level of commitment to running was viewed by participants as being predominantly healthy and provides them with a subjective sense of meaning, value and significance. It does this in a number of ways, all of which will have important implications for the promotion and participation in physical subcultures such as distance running specifically and in physical activity more generally. Stressing the importance of autonomously selected activity which is engaged first and foremost for its ability to produce pleasure and enjoyment and which fulfils basic human needs and desires may be instrumental for further understanding, explaining and perhaps increasing physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Using ‘serious leisure’ as a conceptual framework, participants develop a competence for their chosen activity in an attempt to achieve mastery in sport and leisure, and are gradually yet continuously able to achieve personal and collective accomplishment through the accumulation of skills and knowledge and the desire to persevere. The ability of physical activity to fulfil psychological needs and desires for self-esteem, efficacy, confidence, satisfaction, gratification and perhaps self-actualization is an additional and important benefit of exercise adherence that is often afforded less attention and importance than the oft stressed physical health benefits. Finally, the creation of a personal and social identity and lifestyles based around the physical activity is a means of achieving relatedness to like-minded individuals and to becoming a part of a cherished social world and ethos. What ultimately results is the
participation in a serious leisure pursuit that becomes about so much more than simply exercise, sport or physical activity, but rather a complete way of life and state of being and which most certainly contributes to an enhanced state of overall physical, psychological and social health and well-being. A state that all individuals, samples and populations would be well advised to emulate.
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Appendix 1: Participant Informed Letter of Consent

Exercise Commitment Study

Investigators:
Dan Way, B.M.Sc. (M.Sc. candidate)
Gretchen Kerr, Ph.D. (Supervisor)
Michael Atkinson, Ph.D. (Supervisor)

Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences, Faculty of Physical Education and Health
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Dear Participant,

I am kindly inviting you to participate in my research study which seeks to explore your commitment to exercise, including both positive and negative aspects and experiences of exercise behaviour. I have designed and am completing this project in partial fulfillment of my M.Sc. graduate degree at the University of Toronto. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Toronto which can be reached at:

Office of Research Ethics
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor
Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273
Fax: +1 416 946-5763
ethics.review@utoronto.ca
http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researhers-administrators/ethics/

I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to qualitatively examine your commitment to exercise as a self-described highly committed and adherent exerciser and the value and importance of exercise behaviours to your life. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the positive and negative aspects of your exercise and how you deal with any problems or conflicts that exercise may cause. Finally, I am interested in whether the term ‘addiction’ could apply to exercise behaviour and how you feel about this term being applied to your own behaviours.

II. PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview conducted by the primary investigator, Dan Way, at a location and time of your convenience but preferentially at the University of Toronto. The interview will likely take about an hour to complete. You will also be asked to fill out a short demographic and exercise behaviour questionnaire. Please be assured that you retain the right to dropout of the study at any point and may refuse to answer any questions that you wish. Finally, you will be invited to take part in a member-checking/debriefing session to go over the study findings after the conclusion of the study. If interested, you may provide contact and correspondence information which will be used to arrange the debriefing session or to send you an electronic or mail version of the study findings.

III. CONFIDENTIALITY & DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Please be advised that all of your written, oral and transcribed information as well as the data concerning you will be treated as strictly confidential. Only the primary investigator (Way) and two supervisors (Atkinson & Kerr) will have access to the data and we will not disclose the names of individual participants to anyone. All data from the interview will be transcribed verbatim and further coded to remove any identifiable information. The data will be secured on a password secured workstation, and the student researcher (D Way) is the only person who has the capability to log into this workstation. This workstation is located in a locked office at the University of Toronto. The only person the data will be shared with is the student’s supervisors. Some quotations from the interview will be used in the write-up of the study but your identity will remain anonymous through the use of a pseudonym and the elimination of any identifiable information. Apart from the write-up of the study as part of the primary investigators’ MSc. thesis, this information will also be submitted for publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal at some time in the future.

IV. RISKS & BENEFITS

There are few physical, emotional or social risks anticipated for participation in this research study. Some questions may be of a sensitive nature and will be answered only at your own discretion. Questions pertaining to the term ‘addiction’ may be received with hostility and restraint but be assured that it is not our intention to label your behaviour as potentially addictive, but rather to inquire as to your own opinion on the use of this term in regard to exercise behaviours.

The personal benefits of this study include the opportunity to take part in valuable and worthwhile research that explores and informs our understanding of exercise behaviours. You will be given the opportunity to talk about your own exercise behaviours and how they add value and meaning to your life. The information you provide will contribute to a greater understanding among researchers, clinicians and the general public of exercise commitment as well as health-related attitudes and behaviours of physically active Canadian adults. It may also assist in the development and implementation and promotion of health and fitness programs that are more accessible and meet the unique needs and requirements of a broader range of people in
our community. Furthermore, you will be compensated for your participation in the study by receiving a $10 gift card to Second Cup as a token of appreciation.

V. SUBJECT’S STATEMENT

I have read the consent form and I feel that all of my questions and concerns have been answered to my satisfaction. I am aware that should I, at any time during my participation in this study, have any further questions or concerns; I can contact Dan Way at 416-565-9429. I fully understand the procedures involved and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

I _______________________________ of ___________________________________

(name)                                           (phone number, email, or contact info)
volunteer to participate as a subject in the research study entitled “Exercise Motivation and Health Behaviour Study” that is being conducted by Dan Way of the Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences at the University of Toronto.

Participant Signature: _____________________________

Date: ___________________________
Appendix 2: Participant Demographic and Exercise Questionnaire

Age: _____

Sex:  Male  □    Female  □

Height: ______
Weight: ______

Average exercise adherence (hours per week to closest 30min): __________

Average days per week of exercise: __________

For how long have you been exercising regularly? _________________

Primary mode/type of exercise (eg. running, soccer, aerobics, weightlifting, etc.):
__________________________________________________________

If multiple types apply, please list all:__________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Thank-you.
Appendix 3: Preliminary Interview Schedule

**General:** Please explain the value and importance of physical activity to your life?

**Probes:** Describe the positive benefits or aspects of (your) physical activity behaviours.

Why do you exercise? Reasons, motivations, goals, etc...
What rewards or outcomes do you value from your physical activity?
What does ‘commitment to exercise’ mean to you?
What led you to begin exercising in the first place?
Where does exercise rank as a priority in your life?

**General:** Describe any negative aspects or experiences of exercise.

**Probes:** Has your exercise ever caused any conflicts or problems in your life?

How does exercise affect other areas of your life?
Do you use exercise to control or modify your mood, feelings, affect, etc.?
How do you feel if you have to miss or reduce your exercise for a few days?
How would you feel if you were told to stop exercising permanently?
Do you currently, or have you ever, considered your exercise behaviours to be excessive, obsessive, compulsive or addictive?
Do you think such terms can be appropriately applied to exercise behaviours?
Do you believe there is such a thing as “unhealthy” exercise behaviour or commitment?

**General:** How important is diet to your exercise behaviours or to exercise in general?

**Probes:** What role does diet and nutrition play for your exercise?
Are you or have you ever been concerned about your diet in regards to your exercise behaviours?
How satisfied are you with your current body weight and shape?
What role does exercise play in determining your body satisfaction and overall self-esteem?

**General:** Do you have any final comments or thoughts about either: commitment to exercise; positive/beneficial aspects of exercise; and/or negative/unhealthy aspects of exercise?