SKATING THE LINE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY-BASED STUDY OF FORMER

FIGURE SKATERS' TENSIONS IN THEIR SPORT

by

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Abstract

 Figure skaters skate a fine line as they navigate pressures to execute physically demanding, technical skills while maintaining the aesthetics of movements, appearance, and musicality. These conditions along with embedded narratives of success and performance affect the experiences of every competitive figure skater. As a former figure skater and coach, in this research, I explore the experiences of figure skaters and the inherent tensions they endure (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009).

 Integrating theories and methods from organizational culture and narrative inquiry, my research explores the experiences of athletes within the culture of high-performance figure skating. I recruited seven former figure skaters (four female and three male) who had competed at a Senior Competitive level in Canada. The research followed three guiding questions:

- What tensions do former figure skaters identify in relation to their experience as high-performance figure skaters?

- How are these tensions related to the organizational culture of figure skating?

- How do participants reflect on these tensions over time?

 Using artifacts to elicit conversations and reflections, I completed three to four interviews with each participant. I present their stories in a variety of narrative formats to better capture the feel of the interviews and their lived experiences. The figure skaters experienced multiple tensions across their careers as they embraced the lifestyle of a skater and during transitions away from the sport. Tensions included monitoring bodies, an overriding emphasis on competitions and winning, and the importance of music, choreography, and appearance in their overall performance as elite figure skaters. While many tensions were taken-for-granted as being a high-performance athlete, once removed from the sport, participants became aware of the

sacrifices they had made and how some aspects of the culture had influenced their mental health and well-being.

A critical analysis of the normalized aspects of the sport revealed an emphasis on performance deeply embedded across all levels of figure skating's organizational culture (Schein, 2010). The dissertation highlights how participants became part of the problematic culture, accepting its localized terms and conditions which in turn served to reinforce and re-create the culture's dominant values and norms (Alvesson, 2013; Smircich, 1983).

Lay Summary

As a former figure skater and coach, in this research, I explore the experiences of figure skaters and the inherent tensions they endured in their training and competition. Using artifacts to elicit conversations and reflections, I completed in-depth interviews with seven former high-performance figure skaters. I present their stories in a variety of narrative formats to capture the feel of the interviews and their lived experiences. Tensions included monitoring bodies, an overriding emphasis on competitions and winning, and the importance of music, choreography, and appearance in their overall performance as elite figure skaters. While many tensions were taken-for-granted as being a high-performance athlete, once removed from the sport, participants became aware of the sacrifices they had made and how some aspects of the culture had influenced their mental health and well-being. Findings support the need for critical conversations about the normalizing conditions in high-performance sport.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, C. Mills. The data reported in Chapters 3-8 was covered by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board: Certificate Number H14-00924 (Principal Investigator: Dr. Robert Sparks).

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Chapter 1: **Introduction**

This dissertation uses a narrative approach to explore the experiences of former high-performance figure skaters within the organizational culture of their sport. I have structured the dissertation using the power of personal narratives to demonstrate the varied social contexts and values in high-performance sport. In this chapter, I introduce the dissertation by providing three observational vignettes from my own experience to provide context for the project. I then discuss my story in relation to the dominant narratives of figure skating and high-performance sport, highlighting the importance of narrative research. I conclude the chapter with a brief overview of the structure of the dissertation.

1.1   The Results Board[1]

I take a deep breath and with it comes the arena smells, a combination of hair spray, smelly feet, and French fries. I am happy to be in the warm lobby sipping my coffee. My toes are numb from standing at the side of the arena as each of my skaters competed. I have been at the arena since 6 am. It is now 11 am, and this is the first time I have sat down to take a break and eat. I look at the crowd of skaters and parents swarming the volunteer who has come to post the results. Soon, there are squeals of excitement and a rumble of discussions.

This is Sally's first year competing in the Juvenile Women's[2] category. She had a good skate, but she is competing against some very strong skaters who will likely move up to the Pre Novice Women's category next year. Sally should place in the top half – I am proud of her skate and happy with her progress, but I know she will not be happy with her placement. I predict she will end up around 6th or 7th. She usually places in the top three.

I watch from my chair as Sally goes to look at the results board. She waits patiently as the girls in front of her find out their placements. She is still wearing her sparkly red skating

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[1] Throughout this dissertation personal reflections and stories will be placed in text boxes.
[2] Skaters compete at various levels based on testing and in some cases age. The levels a Competitive Skater progresses through are Juvenile, Pre Novice, Novice, Junior, and Senior.

dress, hoping that she will win a medal and have her photograph taken on the podium. She steps forward and scans the sheet, 6th place. She looks at her mom.

"Jackie won again", her mom mumbles, as she writes down everyone's results. Sally watches her mom's reaction. This is very different from last year when she had instantly given Sally a big hug and began planning a celebration for her 'big win'. Sally waits patiently until her mom notices her, "It's ok Sally. You had fun, that's all that counts." The words come out in a well scripted, half-hearted way – her eyes never leaving the results board.

The words mean nothing – Sally sees her mom's disappointment in her body language. She knows she has let her mom down this year.

1.2   The Axel

As I walk up to Mark's house I wonder why he has requested this meeting. His daughter, Jennifer, has been skating well and I am seeing huge improvements every day. She is still struggling with her axel, but it is close – so close – any day now she will land it. The axel is the first jump where skaters complete more than one rotation in the air, and it takes everyone a long time to master. At my last meeting with Mark he told me he was taking Jennifer to skate at another training facility for a couple of weeks. I'll never forget the look on her face when I went to see her practice... she was so scared. The smiley, fun, and confident young girl I knew was so intimidated she would barely leave the side of the boards. Her axel had regressed. The coach she was working with had changed her jumping technique. She had gone from being very close to landing it to frustrated and confused. It has taken us months to get back on track.

Mark looks very serious when he answers the door. We enter the house and sit in the living room. "We need to chat about Jennifer's skating," he says, "why is she still not landing her axel?"

I try to explain to him that we need to be patient... that there are many ways of teaching an axel, but the most important thing is to be consistent and not to confuse Jennifer with different information. What she really needs, I think, is to believe she can do it – and to stop coming home to people asking her why she isn't landing it and implying that there is something wrong with her.

I come out of my daydreaming as Mark starts talking again. He looks at me with a serious face and says, "She needs to be pushed. It's ok if you make her cry."

1.3 We Don't Sugar Coat Things

It is competition time again. I always get excited, but nervous, at competitions... I have prepared each skater as much as I can and now I have to send each of them out on the ice alone and watch. "Have fun!" I say as Elizabeth skates to her starting position. As her music starts, she seems shaky. "Relax" I say under my breath – bending my knees hoping that she will do the same. I am excited to watch her perform her new program. We had so much fun designing it and adding new choreography – the program really suits her. Her training has been going well and I know if she has a clean skate she will win the competition.

The three-minute program seems like it will never end... one mistake after another. My heart goes out to Elizabeth. I know she will be frustrated. She glides off the ice towards me. What can I say? I smile, "Well, that didn't go quite the way you wanted, did it? But, there were some good parts to it – tell me one thing you did well."

Elizabeth replies, "I landed my double toe."

"Yes, you did, first double toe in competition, way to go!" I reply as we head to the change room for Elizabeth to take off her skates. She is disappointed – so am I – it's never fun to underperform at a competition. As she collects her things we discuss what she can work on when we get home. After that, we head into the lobby.

Her mom greets us saying, "Well that was the crappiest skate I've ever seen."

I'm shocked. Does she think this is going to be helpful? Does she not realize that Elizabeth is already frustrated? How is this attitude going to help? I take a deep breath. I look at her mom, then Elizabeth. "She landed her first double toe in competition," I say, proud of what Elizabeth has done and proud of the chat we had after her skate.

Suzanne looks at me, "We don't sugar coat things in our family." Elizabeth doesn't say a word.

I am so frustrated... I wish her parents would be patient and give me a chance to do things my way – focusing on the positive while developing her skills. She will get there. There is no point yelling; there is no point telling her what she already knows she has done wrong. But

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it's useless. I know they are going to go home and watch the video of Elizabeth and every other competitor in her event and critique her every move. Instead of pointing out the areas she has improved – in her speed, in her choreography, in her confidence and composure even after a tough skate - they will focus on the falls, the missed steps, and the failure to win.

1.4   My Story: Coming to Know Figure Skating in a New Way

As I reflect on my own experiences, I am reminded of the many mixed emotions I felt as a professional figure skating coach. While there were many great moments throughout my career, I also experienced discomfort and frustrations, what narrative inquirers call tensions (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009). Tensions appear when personal narratives and experiences bump up against grand narratives that exist at a societal or cultural level (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I experienced tensions when my views on coaching did not align with those around me. I enjoyed working with skaters, teaching them new skills, and helping them reach their potential. However, the pressure from some parents, administrators, and other coaches to produce winning athletes often led to heated discussions that made me question my philosophies. My experiences and beliefs diverged from the dominant performance narrative pervasive in high-performance sport; one that focuses on winning. Was it really okay to make skaters cry? Was my approach of focusing mainly on the positive aspects of a skater's performance really sugar coating things?

The high-performance sport system measures success in terms of winning, and this is the model from which children's sports are developed (Ingham, Chase, & Butt, 2002). This narrow definition of excellence, which focuses on comparative results rather than personal improvements and disregards long term participation and self-esteeming experiences, has become a dominant way of thinking about sport today (Donnelly, 1996). Individuals learn at a young age what is expected of an athlete, drawing on cultural narratives to help make sense of

experiences and gain an understanding of the world around them. One of the functions of narratives, therefore, is to provide guidance for individuals (Bamberg, 2004).

Integral to the performance narrative is competition and comparison, where success is measured in terms of being better than others (Coakley, 1992; Donnelly, 1996; Dubin, 1990; Kidd, 1988). There is an emphasis on the "single minded dedication and focus" (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 14) necessary to succeed in high-performance sport while normalizing the idea that one must make sacrifices and win at all costs. Athletes learn what it means to be an athlete through the 'sport ethic' which includes characteristics such as making sacrifices for the game, striving for distinction, accepting risks and playing through pain (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). The sport ethic is embedded within performance narratives and passed on to new members contributing to a sport's cultural script and reinforcing the norms of high-performance sport (Coakley, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2015).

Reflecting on my coaching career, and my reasons for leaving it, I realize many of the tensions I experienced were related to the pervasiveness of the performance narratives surrounding winning, often at the expense of overall health and well-being of athletes. As a coach, I wanted to give my skaters the best possible training and enjoyed helping them improve their skills. In an ongoing effort to become the best coach I could, I took courses, talked to other coaches, and became involved in committees to discuss athlete development and team selections. However, the more I learned about how others developed high-level athletes, the more concerned I became. Hearing firsthand how some top coaches selected and trained skaters, it became clear to me that their focus on the outcome of competitions was not congruent with my philosophy of helping every skater reach his or her potential nor did it align with my focus on the process and personal development of every participant. For example, one coach explained that his selection

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process for taking on new students included meeting the parents to see what their body type was (i.e., does the skater have good genes?) and then asking what they did for a living (i.e., did they have the financial means to support a figure skater?).

Even more concerning, were some of the coaching practices I witnessed. Too often, I observed skaters being ridiculed by coaches in front of others, being yelled at to the point of tears, or possibly even worse, being completely ignored by their coach because they were skating poorly. I watched and wondered if this was a necessary part of creating elite athletes. Barker-Ruchti (2008) expressed a similar concern in her research with elite gymnasts,

> The situation I observe today is awful. I feel terrible for Phoebe. Nobody seems to be sympathetic toward her. My heart wrenches as I watch the girl stand by the beam crying. I would like to walk over to her and give her a hug. 'Does this have to be like this?' I ask myself. 'Is this going to make Phoebe a successful elite gymnast? Is this what it takes? (p. 375)

In many cases I felt as though I was the only one concerned about the situations I witnessed. It appeared as if these were normalized, unquestioned, taken-for-granted elements of a skater's development. I had many conversations with other coaches and skaters about my concerns, however, most seemed to have found ways to reconcile any tensions that they experienced and accept without questions the organizational culture of the sport.

Organizational culture refers to shared meanings and assumptions about the way things are done in an organization (Glisson, 2007; Pettigrew, 1979). These cultures are complex and continually evolving as participants create and re-create norms, values, and artifacts influencing the experiences of everyone who comes in contact with the culture (Smircich, 1983). Critically analyzing meanings and symbolism in organizations, as well as the ways in which culture is

created, maintained, and reinforced, helps to contextualize and understand the experiences of participants within the culture.

We are all part of interconnected, nested stories that influence how we see the world (Clandinin, 2013; Smith, 2010). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) developed narrative inquiry as a theory and method to studying these experiences. In narrative inquiry, researchers and participants spend time together discussing experiences in relation to a specific topic (or topics), which may help uncover previously unconscious actions and beliefs. Much of the limited research on figure skating has explored gender, race, and class through a historical or media analysis of the sport. However, we know very little about the actual experiences of high-performance figure skaters, the tensions they may experience, and how they accommodate and work through these tensions. This dissertation is my journey, using a narrative inquiry-based approach, into the experiences of former figure skaters within the sport's organizational culture. Exploring the personal experiences of former figure skaters through narratives along with an exploration of the cultural narratives of figure skating has helped me understand the ways in which skaters are shaped by the culture of figure skating and the ways they in turn shape the culture. While I came to this project critical of the system, and others within the system, I realized through my research how, as a coach, I was a part of shaping the culture as I uncritically accepted norms and values that I now realize are problematic.

When approaching a research project, Clandinin (2013) reminds researchers about the importance of identifying personal, practical, and social justifications for our work. My research is tied to my personal experiences as a figure skater, figure skating coach, and now critical researcher. This work is important to me in terms of helping me to better understand my own experiences, including tensions, within figure skating. My practical justification for this research

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relates to these tensions and my overall belief that the current formal figure skating system is not meeting the needs of many participants. I believe sharing stories and experiences of those who have been a part of the system can potentially lead to necessary change. Finally, my social and theoretical justifications relate to the potential of this research to further understandings of high-performance sport and help make high-performance sport more socially just. I have always loved figure skating and know many people who feel the same way about it. I believe the sport is worth improving; it is worth changing the system to make it more suitable for more people because, at its core, figure skating is a unique sport that provides opportunities for the development of athletic skill and creativity.

My methodological approach to this research is also based on personal, practical, and social justifications that support the broader academic rationale for this work. My personal justifications relate to my love for stories, and my sense of their value. I enjoy listening to and telling stories. Stories stimulate understandings about each other and the world in which we live. By writing down my story and the stories of others, I have been able to unpack and understand my personal tensions. Through this dissertation, I am interested in sharing stories about experience as a way of initiating conversations that can lead to critical changes in the system. Practically, narrative inquiry is rooted in the understanding that everyone's stories have value. To fully honour individual stories in methodological terms, in narrative inquiry it is important to keep stories intact and contextually situated rather than pull out short quotations to support arguments and theoretical frameworks. Finally, capturing and sharing narratives transmits cultural understanding and facilitates meaningful connection.

1.5   Research Questions

Using a narrative inquiry-based approach, the purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of high-performance figure skaters within the organizational culture and performance narratives of the sport. The following research questions (RQ's) guided my research:

RQ1: What tensions do former figure skaters identify in relation to their experience as high-performance figure skaters?

RQ2: How are these tensions related to the organizational culture of figure skating?

RQ3: How do participants reflect on these tensions over time?

    a. At what point(s) did former figure skaters become aware of these tensions?

    b. In what ways have their perceptions changed since retirement?

    c. Since retirement, what (if any) different tensions have emerged?

    d. How do participants reflect on their experiences now?

1.6   Dissertation Outline / My Contribution

In this dissertation, I present a series of stories and reflections as a basis for analyzing the social structures and consequences of the high-performance culture of figure skating and for making connections between theory and experience. In *Chapter 1,* I introduce my research and discuss how I arrived at the research questions. In *Chapter 2,* I review research on figure skating and high-performance sport, including research on performance narratives. Following this, I review narrative inquiry and organizational culture literature, the two major frameworks I have drawn on for the dissertation. *Chapter 3* presents the research methods and includes details about the research participants. In *Chapter 4,* I provide context for figure skating in Canada, outlining some of the rules and regulations of the sport. In *Chapter*

5 I present my research findings on the tensions former figure skaters identified in relation to their experiences as high-performance skaters (RQ1). In *Chapter 6,* I examine how tensions related to participants experiences of meanings, symbolism, values, artifacts, and assumptions are positioned within the organizational culture of figure skating (RQ2). In *Chapter 7,* I present a fictionalized dialogue between participants to examine similarities and differences in how the participants reflected on their experiences over time. This chapter explores when participants became aware of tensions they experienced, how their perceptions have changed, including new tensions that may have emerged since their retirement, as athletes as well as overall reflections about their experiences (RQ3). In *Chapter 8,* I summarize my findings in relation to my research questions, and explore my new understandings of the tensions, performance narratives, and organizational culture as well as the contributions my research makes to the literature. I also explore potential outlets for dissemination of my results and ideas for change. Finally, I examine limitations of the current research and recommendations for future research. *Chapter 9* is a brief epilogue to the dissertation updating some of the changes to the figure skating system and updated resources available to national team athletes.

Chapter 2: **Literature Review**

This chapter begins with a brief overview of relevant research on the history and social context of figure skating to familiarize the reader with the sport and identify the key gaps in the literature. Next, I review research on the broader system of high-performance sport, on narratives within this system, and on the sport ethic and what it means to be an athlete. Lastly, I examine two bodies of research which I use to frame my study theoretically: organizational culture and narrative inquiry.

2.1   Figure Skating: A Brief History

Skating as a mode of transportation and recreational activity dates back hundreds of years (Hines, 2006). Hines (2006) identifies the birthplace of figure skating as England in 1660 where upperclass "gentlemen [were] fascinated by the tracings they could leave on the ice" (p. 3). The emergence of organized, competitive skating (including speed skating, ice hockey and figure skating) is said to have begun in the late 1800s (Hines, 2006).

Figure skating began in the late eighteenth century (Adams, 2004; Hines, 2006). Early forms of figure skating, a pastime of privileged men, took place on outdoor ice surfaces, with the size, shape and quality of the ice determining the types of activities that would occur (Adams, 2004). The two most common techniques of figure skating during the 1800s were the English style of upright controlled movement through edges and turns, and the Continental style of more free-flowing movement which included spins and jumps (Adams, 2011; Hines, 2006). The bourgeois roots of skating influenced the styles of dress and styles of movements, especially in England where textbooks detailed the precise 'gentlemanly' poses considered appropriate. Figure skating became a marker of upper class European movements. As Adams explains:

In this way figure skating codified general, often unspoken, norms concerning bodies and

forms of movement that were rooted in bourgeois and white European traditions that

contrasted clearly with movement norms from other cultures like, for instance, those

evident in South Asian or African styles of dance that employ angular or bent limbs.

(2011, p. 175)

As Kestnbaum (2003) explains, individuals learned "not only to enjoy the kinesthetic experience

of skating movement but also to convey messages about their standing as skaters through such

codes as controlled posture and polished movements on the ice" (p. 59). Participation in figure

skating provided an opportunity for the primarily male members to demonstrate their social

class, sophistication, and wealth (Adams, 2011). As the popularity of skating grew, the

International Skating Union was founded in 1892 to oversee rules and regulations of the sport

including what clothing was appropriate to wear and the number and type of jump and spin

elements to be executed in competition (ISU, n.d.).

2.1.1 Influence of social class.

In many respects the roots of upper class figure skating remain visible today as elite

ideals continue to influence moves, costuming, and participants. Adams (2011) explains that

upper class individuals are taught a specific way to hold and present themselves. Good posture

is important, as it is a "visible sign of class difference... one of the less tangible effects of a

privileged upbringing" (Adams, 2011, p. 175). Individuals are taught not to slouch and to

always look presentable. In addition, the music used to support individual figure skating

programs is often taken from classical selections.

The financial costs associated with figure skating continue to shape the sport and can be a

barrier for participation with expenses including skates, costumes, ice time, coaching, travel, and

competition fees. An article in *The Gazette* broke down the costs for Joseph Phan, a Canadian figure skater who competed at the Novice level in 2014. The total estimated yearly expense for his training was around $31,950 including skates - $1500, yearly sharpening costs of approximately $1500, costuming - $1500 for two outfits, ice time - $2700, coaching fees - $9500, travel - $5000, competition/seminar expenses - $1850, and transportation costs - $8400 (Branswell, 2014).

Further to these associated costs, Rand (2012) details the burden that a skater's lack of financial resources may bring with respect to coaching. Each participant hires and pays for lesson time on an individual basis. Coaches' rates vary based on certification and years of coaching experience. A highly certified coach, who regularly attends seminars and upgrading opportunities, would charge a higher hourly rate. Coaches who regularly attend seminars have two distinct advantages. First, they learn about changes in the system and are therefore able to maximize their skater's potential to earn valuable points in competition (Rand, 2008). Second, coaches make connections with judges and other technical staff making it easier to gain clarification of rules and judging criteria. As Rand (2012) explained, these coaches have the "in crowd advantage" (p. 38) that comes with knowing the right people and being at the right place at the right time. If individuals are unable or unwilling to pay for the top coaches, they are unlikely to succeed in the sport beyond a recreational level (e.g., Pre Novice / Novice competitive). Furthermore, highly certified coaches often choose to work in major training centres where seminars and upgrading are also more readily available and affordable and the larger population of skaters makes it easier to earn a full-time income (Rand, 2012). In a geographically expansive country such as Canada, this disadvantages skaters who live in smaller,

more isolated communities where it is not only more difficult to attract high level coaches, but also more expensive for skaters themselves to travel to training seminars and competitions.

2.1.2 Gendered norms in figure skating.

Early skating clubs limited membership to male members, however, in the late 1920s the gender dynamics of the sport began to shift. Some researchers have attributed the shift to the influence of Sonja Henie, a young female Norwegian skater. Henie was considered by many as the first female to be "systematically trained at such a young age" (Hampe, 1994, as cited in Adams, 2011, p. 145). She followed a strict diet and trained up to five hours a day. However, it was not her training per se that made Henie a stand out skater, rather her presentation including her detailed costumes complete with fur accents and white skates (Hines, 2006). Her style pulled spectators' attention away from the blade to the performance itself and as Adams (2011) explained:

> She changed free skating from a somewhat arcane exercise that was difficult for non-skaters to appreciate into an exciting and moving, almost theatrical performance that could appeal to spectators with no prior knowledge of the sport. (p. 147)

In 1936 Henie retired from competition and moved to Hollywood where she brought figure skating to the masses through movies (Hines, 2006). For many people, this was the first time they had seen figure skating, and the result was that Henie and her style (i.e., 'toe picky' ballet-like turns) became synonymous with the emerging activity. Additionally, many saw her skating as a feminine form of dancing on ice and failed to understand it as competitive sport (Adams, 2011).

Moves once considered a symbol of male upper class, 'proper' behaviour became attributed more to being feminine or 'non-masculine'. The increasing number of women

involved in figure skating, as well as the emphasis on graceful, effortless movements led to speculation about the sexuality of male competitors who were involved in the sport (Adams, 2011). Concerns over male effeminacy resulted in a distinct attempt to differentiate between male and female competitors. In the 1980s and 1990s, what Adams (2011) termed the macho turn of skating, there appeared to be a concerted effort for male skaters to look tough and emphasize power. For example, the media and Elvis Stojko[3] himself emphasized his masculinity by demonstrating his strength in martial arts, ensuring that spectators would know he was more than just a figure skater (Adams, 2011). In 2009, Skate Canada was criticized for an alleged tough guy campaign that would rebrand the sport to focus on its risk and athleticism (Adams, 2011). While the national organization claimed that by tough they meant difficult, the undertones and focus on hypermasculinity in male skaters was concerning. An article published in *Newsweek* once again brought issues of homophobia in figure skating to the forefront as it explained how gay athletes in the sport are meant to mask their sexuality and skate in a non-effeminate way (Jones, 2014). Previous research has explored the issues of sexuality and gendered expectations for male competitors in figure skating in some detail (Adams, 2011).

While male competitors are socialized to look more masculine, female competitors are socialized to look more feminine. As one participant interviewed by McGarry (2005) explains, female skaters must "pass as ladies" (para. 2), based on very specific ideas of femininity. Feder (1994) explains that femininity is often exaggerated in sports where physical capabilities no longer distinguish men and women. While male skaters are encouraged to be aggressive and

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[3] Elvis Stojko was a Canadian figure skater, three-time world men's figure skating champion, and two-time Olympic silver medallist known for his martial arts background which he incorporated into his skating (Adams, 2011).

attack jumps, the expectation of female skaters is to perform "gentle, but assertive, ladylike edges" (McGarry, 2005, para. 9). Gender is built directly into competition, with costuming, makeup, and soft movements masking the athleticism required for female skaters to execute triple jumps and flying sit-spins (Feder, 1994). Rules and regulations allow male competitors to have longer programs and attempt more jump elements, guaranteeing that the top male competitor will always beat the top female competitor in points[4] (Adams, 2011).

The media have been integral in the process of normalizing people's perceptions of gender differences in figure skating. As Adams (2011) explains, setbacks by females are more likely to be attributed to their own shortcomings, while setbacks by males are framed in terms of the strength of other competitors. "A woman's athleticism is belittled, often undercut in commentary which calls attention away from her athletic ability and right back to her physical appearance" (Feder, 1994, p. 70). In addition, the media often discuss body types and appearance distinguishing between 'powerful' skaters and 'delicate graceful' skaters. This differentiation is made between male and female skaters, with female skaters applauded for grace and criticized for power while males experience the opposite.

The removal of figures from competition may be one of the most obvious examples of the media and skating organizations prioritizing a specific body type and physique in figure skating. Figures, which involved creating geometric shapes while the body remained upright, were eliminated from competition in 1990 (Kestnbaum, 2003; McGarry, 2003). The skill and precision required in figures was not dependent on one's body type and appearance, rather on

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[4] Skaters are assigned points for each element they complete; therefore, with less opportunities and time to complete elements, female competitors have fewer opportunity to earn points.

attention to detail, control, and focus of the skater. Mastery of geometric shapes and designs required in figures took many years of training (Hines, 2006). Marks were assigned purely on the tracings left on the ice, not the performance of the figures (i.e., how they looked when they performed them). Therefore, while many authors attribute the decline of figures primarily to the lack of entertainment value for spectators (McGarry, 2003), a more critical view suggests there is more complexity embedded in the decision. Media coverage of World and Olympic competitions did not broadcast the figure portion of the event, beginning their coverage after its completion. This meant crowd favourites in freeskate could begin the televised portion of the overall event already trailing seemingly unknown leaders. For example, in the early 1970s Janet Lynn, who became the sweetheart of America, was highlighted in the media as innocent, glamorous, and refined. She competed against "the stocky, modest skater Beatrice Shuba" (Fabos, 2001, p. 190) who excelled in school figures. When Shuba created a strong enough lead after the figures event to beat her 'pixie' rivals, the weighting of figures in competitions was questioned and a second freeskate program (the short program) was added. This change increased the opportunity for skaters who excelled at jumping and spinning to attain more points. Fabos (2001) explains, "with this change, school figures could no longer give stockier skaters a potential advantage" (p. 190). While figures focussed on detail and precision of tracings left on the ice, freeskate focussed (and continues to focus) not only on the completion of specific skills, but also on the way they are executed. The sport shifted from one focused on technical skills and intricate designs on the ice to a sport where style and presentation were also emphasized. Along with the transition began a shift to younger Olympic figure skating champions (e.g., Oksana Baiul was 16 when she competed in 1994; Tara Lipinski was 15 in 1998; Sarah Hughes was 16

in 2002) something that had not happened since Sonja Henie's Olympic gold medal in 1928 at 15 years of age (Hines, 2006).

2.1.3 Performance and style in figure skating.

Audiences and judges gain insight into the persona of skaters through the way they act and dress on the ice. Music, choreography, and costumes create the mood and artistic basis of skaters' programs. In the new judging system, which came into effect in 2004, skaters are awarded marks for executed elements (such as jumps, spins, and footwork) as well as program components (such as skating skills, transitions, performance/execution, interpretation, and, choreography/composition). Skaters' music selection, choreography, costuming, and overall appearance (of the skill, but also the person) may be incorporated into the overall marks awarded.

Van Veen's (2012) research explores the influence that the new judging system has had on the movement practices of ice dancers. Through her interviews with judges, coaches, and skaters, she found an increased emphasis on strength, flexibility, and acrobatics (Van Veen, 2012). While this research was specific to ice dance, similarities may be seen in all skating disciplines. For example, skaters in all disciplines complete a spin element. Within the 6.0 scoring system skaters performed three basic positions: sit, camel, and laybacks. Within the new system skaters are required to perform more variations within these positions, such as leg grabs and other contortions, to receive top marks. These variations reflect flexibility and acrobatic expectations reported by many of Van Veen's (2012) participants.

Social class and gendered performance expectations often intersect, as was the case in the 1994 highly publicized attack on Nancy Kerrigan which emphasized the importance of the appearance of class within the sport. Tonja Harding and Nancy Kerrigan were US figure skating

rivals. After a practice event for the 1994 US Nationals, Nancy Kerrigan was struck in the knees with a steel rod, bruising her legs but not preventing her attendance at the 1994 Olympic Championships (Crossman, 2013; Marshall, 2014). Harding's ex-husband and bodyguard were found guilty of organizing the attack and along with the attacker and getaway driver served time in prison (Crossman, 2013; Marshall, 2014). While Harding has maintained her innocence, during the prosecution of the attackers she was found guilty of hindering the investigation and was subsequently banned for life from participating in United States Figure Skating events as a skater or coach (Marshall, 2014).

The media emphasized differences in appearance, styles, and personalities between the two rivals, as one report summarized:

Kerrigan had grace. Harding had athleticism. Kerrigan had elegance. Harding had aggression. Their rivalry was also cast as Kerrigan's wealth against Harding's poverty, but that wasn't true. Kerrigan came from a blue-collar background, and her father worked two jobs to support her career. (Crossman, 2013, para. 3)

This example suggests that media reporting was based more on the appearance of social class and class stratification, than the actuality. Kerrigan fit the respected 'fairy tale' image of the sport, while Harding challenged ideas of femininity with her power and strength (Marshall, 2014). The incident challenged figure skating's 'nice girl' mystique and brought significant media attention to the sport (Hines, 2006). Increased media coverage of the scandal is thought to have stimulated increased spectatorship and sponsorship in the sport in the late 1990s (Hines, 2006).

Story (2011) investigated retired figure skaters' experiences of age restrictions and body size and type in her Master's thesis research conducted at the University of Alberta. Based on

her findings, Story is critical of the International Skating Union's and Skate Canada's age restrictions that limit older skaters from competing in specific events, suggesting that it contributes to an overall 'girlification' of the sport where prepubescent bodies are valued. Story's (2011) research documents how age restrictions impacted the study participants including stories about attempts to manage weight and evade the onset of puberty. While some participants heard explicitly from coaches that they were 'fat' and needed to lose weight, others regulated their own weight as they accepted the notion that small bodies would rotate quicker and therefore thinner skaters had an advantage (Story, 2011). As Kestnbaum (2003) explains,

> The trends toward younger skaters reaching the highest levels have led to voicing of concern both within and outside the skating community that the image of ideal femininity that skating rewards and so publicly represents is one of delicacy, immaturity, and dependence rather than power, maturity, and autonomy. (p. 167)

2.1.4 Intensive training cultures in figure skating.

Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) have questioned whether outcome and performance-focused environments are healthy and safe contexts for young athletes and whether professionally oriented, competitive sport environments are appropriate for children. In their research, Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) investigated the culture of figure skating through observations and interviews conducted with aspiring national-class skaters, their parents, and club officials. Their findings emphasize the intensity of the training environment for the young participants who were constantly under pressure to perform. Practice sessions, often considered a time when athletes can relax and try new skills, were found to be occasions where skaters continued to be critically evaluated and scrutinized by coaches and parents and where they were forced to remain composed and smile even after hard falls and frustration with training (Grenfell & Rinehart,

2003). Grenfell & Rinehart (2003) critically assess the impacts of these conditions and the

human rights issues associated with this level of intensive training and participation in the sport

(Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003).

2.1.5   Race and culture in figure skating.

In addition to social class and age, skin colour and race are embedded factors in the

complex nexus of performance norms in figure skating. Like many leisure activities, access to

figure skating clubs in some areas was restricted to people who were white. Mabel Fairbanks

(1928-2002) is recognized as one of the first black figure skaters in the United States (Hines,

2006). Fairbanks reportedly received free lessons on public ice sessions by a local coach who

recognized her talent. While her skills progressed quickly, she was unable to compete due to

competition rules that specified that she had to be a member of a club to be eligible (Hines,

2006).

While rules no longer explicitly create barriers for participation to non-white participants,

unwritten expectations favour westernized 'white' skaters. These conditions affect both male

and female skaters, however, much of the social surveillance and normative critique in figure

skating revolves around femininity and female norms. McGarry's work (2005) illustrates the

interplay of gender and racial norms for female skaters. As she explains, expectations for music

and costuming for female skaters ensure smooth lines emphasizing grace, beauty, and elegance

over rigid movements. For example, one coach McGarry interviewed discussed the Japanese-

Canadian students she was training:

> They had some bad techniques they'd been taught by another Japanese coach, and
>
> absolutely no finesse or style really. Bad, wonky Japanese music that they were skating
>
> to too… we want them to blend in… and to realize what a beautiful sport it is and how a

beautiful girl should act and perform with grace. (McGarry, 2005b, para. 17)

"Passing as white" (para. 19) is essential for the success of female competitors with judges, coaches, and media frequently discussing individuals in terms of race (McGarry, 2005). In her research McGarry (2005) found that some judges she spoke to explicitly commented on "unruly" and "ethnic" hair in negative ways suggesting this was less ladylike and therefore less ideal.

Furthermore, the colour of women's skates emphasizes differences in skin colour, favouring skaters with a fairer complexion. White skates, originally introduced by Sonja Henie as a shift from the traditionally black or brown skates, create a visually appealing line to a skater with light coloured skin:

> The gold standard involving this female attribute [white skates] is profoundly raced as well as economically based... they serve a goal that only people with light skin can achieve. Dark legs and white skates have the same effect as their opposite: they make for shorter, chunky-looking legs. (Rand, 2008, p. 560)

Some skaters choose to purchase beige skates or skating tights that cover the skate creating a continuous color line. However, both of these options are also problematic for non-white skaters as they have a harder time finding skates or tights to match their skin tone (Rand, 2008).

2.1.6 Conclusion - A need for further research on the athlete's experience.

Many important social issues in figure skating have been described in the literature relating to gender, age, social class, and race. However, research exploring the experiences of high-performance figure skaters, specifically, the tensions they may experience, and how they accommodate and work through these tensions is limited. With the exception of Van Veen (2012), Story (2011), McGarry (2005) and Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) who conducted field interviews, most research in figure skating has focussed on media representations and analysis

rather than interviews and direct conversations with athletes. There is a need for further ethnographic and narrative-based research on the lives of figure skaters and the culture of figure skating, particularly on the performance norms and 'lived' tensions in the sport and the strategies that athletes undertake to deal with these tensions in their daily lives. This research was undertaken in part to help address this gap.

2.2   High-performance Sport

Bloom, Gagnon, and Hughes (2006) define high-performance sport as encompassing "elite athletes who achieve, or, who aspire to achieve, or, who have been identified as having the potential to achieve excellence in world class competition" (p. 1). Professional sport and the Olympics are two primary systems of high-performance sport. The convergence of these two systems has been characterized as a prolympic system where success is measured only in terms of winning, regardless of personal improvements (Coakley, 1992; Donnelly, 1996; Dubin, 1990; Kidd, 1988). Ingham et al. (2002) argue that prolympism is an "elitist, achievement oriented, and purportedly meritocratic" system (p. 309). Within this 'meritocratic' system is a belief that everyone has the same opportunity to succeed and "if you work hard, possess good skills, and maintain a positive attitude, then you will achieve success" (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010, p. 34). Yet, many have critiqued the belief that sport is a meritocracy, arguing that success is also related to one's socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, and gender.

Prolympic sport is the top of a pyramidal structure where countless athletes are socialized into an outcome-based reward system from a young age. High level coaches, who make their living based on the success of athletes, rarely have a shortage of potential clients willing to pay for their expertise (Coakley, 2010). As athletes move up the pyramid, training becomes more intense and they become part of a commodified system where they are an expendable resource to

those searching for the next champion (Ingham, Blissmer, & Davidson, 1999). The high-performance system will be further explored through discussions of early specialization, disciplining one's body, embedded hegemonic norms, moving out of the system, and living within performance narratives.

2.2.1   Starting at a young age.

Within the high-performance sport system, practice sessions may resemble work with increasing pressures to win and detailed training schedules (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Ingham et al., 2002). In early specialization sports, such as figure skating, gymnastics, diving, and synchronized swimming, complex skills must be learned before puberty (Canadian Sport Institute, 2014). For this reason, athletes begin their involvement in these sports at very young ages. For example, in Skate Canada's learn to skate program, children may begin lessons as early as three years of age (Lockie et al., 2012). Specializing into a single sport at a young age may be problematic because children do not fully understand the consequences of their decision. For example, a child may not anticipate the intense training sessions or potential for injuries at a young age, and therefore cannot consent to it (Weber, 2009).

Training hours for young competitive figure skaters can be extensive. Lang (2010) explains how elite US figure skater Michelle Kwan woke at 3:00 a.m. to practice for three hours before school began. This extensive training, combined with learning high risk elements at a young age, may compromise an athlete's health. Without proper time for the body to recover between training sessions athletes are susceptible to overuse injuries and burnout (Coakley, 1992). It is often only after athletes have left this intense training environment that they may begin to critically assess and 'problematize' their involvement (Donnelly, 1993; Ryan, 2000).

Early sport specialization and long training hours may also lead to constrained experiences outside of sport and the development of a unidimensional self-concept in athletes and restricted control over their own lives (Coakley, 1992). This can impact athletes' independence and self-determination including limiting friendships outside of sport (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Donnelly, 1993; Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003).

2.2.2 Disciplining the body in high-performance training.

Research with swimmers, figure skaters, and gymnasts highlights particular concerns with the constant monitoring of body weight and appearance (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Dacyshyn, 1999; McMahon, Penney, & Dinan-Thompson, 2012; Ryan, 2000). Barker-Ruchti and Tinning (2010) explore women's artistic gymnastics from a Foucauldian perspective. Their ethnographic research highlights the intensity of training environments and discipline within a high-performance gymnastics training environment. Athletes are found to be endlessly monitored and corrected, in machine-like ways with unequal power relations resulting in domination of coaches over athletes to the point of docility (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010).

Research with former high-performance swimmers examines the monitoring of swimming bodies using Foucauldian concepts related to power and surveillance (McMahon, 2010; McMahon & Barker-Ruchti, 2017; McMahon & Penney, 2011; McMahon et al., 2012). McMahon's doctoral research (and subsequent articles) includes three female swimmers (including herself) who competed at an elite level. Participant stories highlight the intense focus on weight they endured at a young age, including punishment for eating specific foods, ridicule and embarrassment for weight gain, and verbal abuse related to their bodies (McMahon, 2010). A focus on body weight and appearance may lead to disordered eating, bulimia, and anorexia, and may have long-term consequences even after retirement (David, 2004; Ryan, 2000).

McMahon (2010) noted how comments about her weight and body that she experienced as a competitive swimmer continued to impact her years after she stopped competing.

2.2.3 Hegemonic norms in high-performance sport.

In addition to the coercive potential of power imbalances, the theory of hegemony helps to explain how power can be asserted consensually through a social acceptance of 'common sense' norms and ideas about how an individual should act. The theory, originally developed by Antonio Gramsci, has been used to explain how societies with major social inequalities are held together through the articulation of social norms within the broader context of commonsensical understandings (Crossman & Scherer, 2015). In high-performance sport, the theory of hegemony may be used to understand athletes' participation in unhealthy and abusive situations such as competing injured. Athletes who want to excel tend to align themselves with dominant narratives of conforming and overconforming to expectations of the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). In this way, they are socialized into a system where dominance of those in power is "exercised not through brute force, but through a cultural dynamic which extends into private life and [the] social realm" (Giddens, 1989, p. 463).

Amplified by the young age at which athletes become involved, power imbalances can be concerning in high-performance sport. As Brackenridge (2004) explains, sport participants look to authority figures such as coaches for guidance. Young athletes see the coach as the expert and are trained not to question what they are asked to do (Brackenridge, 2004). Power imbalances between athletes and authority figures can lead to physical, verbal, and even sexual abuse (Brackenridge, 2000; Leahy, Pretty, & Tenenbaum, 2002). Participants are at risk of being coerced into actions meant to maximize their performance and may endure psychological and physical intimidation daily as they (and their bodies) are analyzed and programmed like

machines rather than appreciated and accommodated as developing human beings (Coakley, 1992; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003).

2.2.4 Issues in transitioning out of high-performance sport

Many researchers have explored transitions of athletes out of high-performance sport, and have found that adjustment to life outside sport is often difficult (Dacyshyn, 1999; Denison, 1996; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). For example, Dacyshyn (1999) explains that participants had difficulty transitioning from training four to six hours a day at a very young age to not participating at all in their sport after retirement. Difficulties were amplified when athletes reflected on their experiences and realized how poorly they had been treated (Dacyshyn, 1999; Ryan, 2000). Ryan (2000) describes how at 17 years of age, Dominique Moceanu, an Olympic gymnast felt she had missed out on socializing, eating ice cream, and attending dances with others her age.

2.2.5 Performance narratives in sport.

Athletes and sports enthusiasts are immersed in a sea of sporting stories, including those in the media about athletes' successes and failures (Smith, 2010). As Douglas and Carless (2006) note, the moral of these stories is often very similar:

> Typically, these stories feature heartache and pain but end with overcoming obstacles and achieving success. Persons connected to the athlete, such as parents and coaches, may contribute to this discourse by telling their own version of the successful athlete's story – typically of the single-minded dedication the athlete displayed in their youth and in their training. (p. 14)

Douglas and Carless (2015) explain that individuals at every level of sport learn from personal experiences "what sport *is,* what it is *for,* what *matters* in sport and what involvement in sport

means" (p. 7, emphasis in original). But learning about sport also comes from other sources such as the media where public portrayals of sport, and specifically what it takes to succeed in sport, reinforce a dominant narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2015). The so-called 'performance narrative', which is outcome focused (i.e., it emphasizes winning), is prominent in high-performance sport. Douglas and Carless (2015) explain that the 'performance narrative' can serve to keep individuals under control in subtle ways. "[These] narratives tend to become hegemonic, totalitarian and ultimately oppressive by constraining or limiting individuals to socially dominant roles, identities or behaviours" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 23).

2.2.5.1 The sport ethic – a core feature of the performance narrative.

Entrenched in the performance narrative are distinct ways of being an athlete. For example, Coakley (2013) describes the concept of the 'sport ethic' as representing "the core norms used by athletes to assess identity and group membership in high-performance sport" (para. 1). It emphasizes sacrifice through dedication to the game, seeking distinction through persistent improvement and striving for perfection, taking and accepting risks associated with participation, and refusing to accept limitations while challenging one's physical and psychological limits (Coakley, 2013; Hughes & Coakley, 1991). It is clear that many high-performance figure skaters embrace the sport ethic, not only conforming to it, but sometimes over-conforming by performing when injured, engaging in rapid weight loss, and overtraining in an attempt to achieve success and gain the acceptance of coaches, parents, and judges (Coakley, 1992; David, 2004; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Ryan, 2000). This widespread understanding of what is means to be a high-performance athlete becomes especially problematic when athletes fail to question their actions in the belief that what they are doing is a necessary part of their sport (Hughes & Coakley, 1991).

2.2.5.2 Underlying narrative - the story of success and overcoming odds.

Dominant narratives, such as the performance narrative, are not *consciously* created and re-created, but rather are embedded within the culture in subtle ways and therefore go unquestioned (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Stories that do not fit the dominant narrative may be silenced as "certain stories are more tellable than others" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 33). This point is demonstrated through public portrayals of sport stories, where success stories and overcoming odds are highlighted above others perpetuating the myth of meritocracy and individual success.

As Douglas and Carless (2015) explain, individual experiences vary within a performance narrative, but the general plot typically remains the same, 1) individuals are oriented to achieve specific performance outcomes such as winning or being the best, 2) the ultimate dream is the podium, medal, cheque, or trophy, and 3) the athlete may have setbacks along the way, but these can be overcome by hard work, discipline, and sacrifice. Individuals' introduction to the performance narrative may be gradual, but as they progress their involvement becomes more serious as coaches, trainers, sport psychologists, and other support staff are recruited to work "on you and for you" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 77). The role of athletes is to fulfil their potential by winning which results in them constantly evaluating themselves in comparison to others. "Descriptions of the *process* of playing sport – for example, for enjoyment, mastery or social reasons – are either absent or side-lined in favour of achieving particular outcomes" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 78). As one participant in Douglas and Carless's (2015) research explained, her aim was to 'put another notch in her gun'. For her, winning and accumulating more notches was more important than individual improvement.

2.2.5.3 The narrative of the successful athlete and issues of narrative wreckage.

When performance outcomes are prioritised, other areas of life tend to be rendered subservient to the performance objectives. Relationships may be sacrificed as the individual's personal time and attention become focused on training. This emphasis is not questioned, rather it is accepted as an inevitable part of being an athlete with sacrifices being discursively framed (i.e., 'storied') as necessary to the pursuit of high-performance. For those aligned with the performance narrative, their sense of self is "closely tied not only to being *an* athlete, but being a *successful* athlete" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 81). This idea of the 'elite athlete' is storied above, and often to the exclusion of, other identities, in the development of a 'monological' (single minded) self (Coakley, 1992; Douglas & Carless, 2015). The performance narrative tends to be linear as well as monological; within it, athletes must take the most direct route to reach the end goal (Douglas & Carless, 2015).

Unfortunately, when athletes' personal experiences do not align with this narrative, they may experience tension, feeling alienated and alone as their own self-stories do not appear to fit within the dominant narrative. Some athletes may experience 'narrative wreckage' and personal trauma as they attempt to reconcile their place within or outside of sport (Carless & Douglas, 2009). As Frank (2010) explains, narrative wreckage comes when individuals lose their way and no longer feel comfortable living the narrative they had been living. As a result, an individual's identity may be threatened as the narrative fails to provide "workable template for life" (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 220).

2.2.5.4 Alternative narratives.

Douglas and Carless (2006) recognize the limitations of the performance narrative and the dearth of alternative narratives available to athletes. In their research, they began to explore

and identify alternative narrative forms. In contrast to the performance narrative which focuses

on winning as the primary objective of high-performance sport, Douglas and Carless (2006)

found that athletes may draw on alternative narratives such as relational and discovery narratives

to make sense of their experiences as high-performance athletes. In the discovery narrative,

athletes may develop self-worth and enjoyment from discovering new experiences with winning

being a functional component of their lives in contrast to the main focus (Douglas & Carless,

2006). Douglas and Carless (2006) suggest within this narrative the primary motive and story of

the athlete is exploration. In the relational narrative, athletes' experiences are understood in

relation to others. That is, an athlete may participate in the sport for another person, such as a

parent. Participation is about the strength of the relationship that is created through the athlete's

participation in the sport (Douglas & Carless, 2006).

While alternative narratives, such as the relational and discovery narratives, may resonate

with some athletes, Douglas and Carless (2006) suggest they are often overshadowed by more

dominant performance narratives. Their research suggests athletes who align with alternative

narratives have fewer narrative wreckages and easier transitions from the sport and therefore

advocate giving more space for these narratives to emerge as accepted and laudable approaches

to high-performance sport.

2.2.5.5 Limitations of alternative narratives - a critique of Douglas and Carless.

While Douglas and Carless's (2006) discussion of alternative narratives is productive, I

believe it overlooks some critical points. First, these narratives are framed as separate forms of

narratives, failing to examine the overlap relational and discovery narratives have with the

performance narrative. All participants in their research were very high-level professional

golfers. That is, it was their success in the performance narrative that allowed them to travel and

explore (i.e., live the discovery narrative). While winning was storied as secondary to the experiences of travel and exploration, without winning, participants would have limited opportunities to fulfil the discovery narrative. Similarly, they describe how 'Leanne' played golf for her father (relational narrative). As Douglas and Carless (2006) write, "Leanne's gift to her father (succeeding in golf) could be considered altruistic; as she put it 'his pleasure was enough for me'" (p. 24). In this way, winning, or success in terms of the performance narrative, remains critical to Leanne's self story. If she were not successful, how would this have impacted her relationship with her father?

Douglas (2014) suggests that athletes need to learn new ways to understand their experiences within sport. She explains, "We perhaps also forget that *athletes (as well as researchers) need help to identify* how their own stories, actions and lives are hidden, normalised and naturalised by a dominant narrative script" (p. 240, emphasis added). While this is true, her perspective locates the problem (and therefore the solution) within the athletes themselves and fails to explore the social and cultural influences on experience. Similarly, the focus on the athlete as the problem has been explored in relation to burnout in sport (Coakley, 1992). In contrast to a psychological approach where athletes are provided tools to deal with the existing organizational setting, Coakley (1992) suggests burnout "is best explained and dealt with as a social problem rather than a personal failure; it is grounded in social organization rather than the character of individuals" (p. 275). He argues that we need to look at the structure and organization of sport programs and social relations rooted in high-performance sport (Coakley, 1992). Burnout is one of many negative outcomes resulting from an uncritical and unreserved engagement in the performance narrative. Like much research on burnout, Douglas and Carless's extensive work draws heavily on a psychological perspective. That is, they emphasize

narrative alignment as an individual problem, however, they do not discuss confronting the dominance of the performance narrative by addressing the ways it is embedded in high-performance sport. I believe it is unrealistic to expect athletes to simply ignore the pervasive narratives and create their own. The issue is more complex, and a more profound intervention would be needed into the structures and culture of high-performance sport itself in order to open alternative possibilities for high-performance athletes. Such interventions might seek to change sport policies about child athletes, for example, restricting the ages at which children may begin formal sport training, and shifting the focus of youth sports events towards process instead of outcome goals.

The approach proposed by Douglas (2014) certainly has merit as a psychological intervention, however, it does not appear to fully capture the influence of the performance narrative and the range of strategies that athletes might need to use to evade the realities of this dominant narrative. It is unlikely that athletes would adopt an outwardly non-conforming or confrontational narrative to represent their interests, partly because of the risks this would entail for their careers, including losing their position on a team, removal of funding, or being ignored by coaches. It is far more likely that they might quietly negotiate these tensions, perhaps by expressing multiple narratives and being able to move between them based on their immediate surroundings and circumstances. Clandinin et al.'s (2009) work supports this latter understanding and acknowledges the importance of alternative narratives.

2.2.5.6 Sacred stories, secret stories, and cover stories.

In a study of public schools, Clandinin et al. (2009) found that teachers often experience tensions between "in-classroom" and "out-of-classroom" places (p. 82). Within their professional training, teachers are expected to follow the curriculum and implement standardized

testing, however, the teachers' personal experiences may suggest that variations on the curriculum and different formatting for exams would be more beneficial for their students (Clandinin et al., 2009). In this way, teachers may experience tensions when their stories and beliefs do not align with expectations. To navigate these tensions, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explain three 'story types' by which individuals live. Sacred stories are those told by institutions and organizations about how things 'should be done' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Secret stories are stories that are kept to oneself (knowing that they do not align with institutional stories), and cover stories are stories individuals tell others in an attempt to portray themselves as being in alignment with sacred stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

Similar to Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) exploration of sacred, secret, and cover stories in schools, the dominant narratives in high-performance sport may not always align with the stories athletes themselves express in the social contexts within which they operate. There is little doubt that, like the teachers, athletes experience tensions as they navigate the pressures of competing at a high level. Despite the limitations noted earlier, the psychological framework developed by Carless and Douglas (2013) does accommodate the possibility of resistance and accommodation as strategies for coping with the conflicting and dehumanizing aspects of the performance narrative. They found, for example, that elite athletes they interviewed followed one of three approaches as they negotiated the culture of their sports. The first was to "live the part of the athlete" conforming to the plot of the performance narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p. 703). With this approach, athletes may experience significant tensions as personal experiences deviate from the performance script they are attempting to follow. A second approach was to "resist the part of the athlete" (p. 703). In this narrative, they report that the athlete "maintain[s] a life story that deviates from the performance narrative, drawing on

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alternative narrative types. Their resistance is typically *overt* as they publicly demonstrate a range of actions that align with their multidimensional story" (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p. 703). A third approach was to 'play the part of the athlete', where athletes modify their story and actions to fit within the sociocultural context. "These individuals *covertly* maintain a multidimensional life story (demonstrating alternative narrative plots) but silence their story in public settings when they perceive powerful others expect a performance story" (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p. 703). These observations align well with Clandinin et al.'s (2009) findings of secret and sacred stories.

2.3   Organizational Culture

Participants, from recreational skaters to competitive national team members, are part of the organizational culture of their club or training center as well as being impacted by provincial, national and international level organizational cultures (e.g., Skate Canada, International Skating Union). These organizations influence the experiences of figure skaters, making it critical to consider not only broad ideas of the social institution of sport and of sport culture, but also organizational culture and the ways in which institutional and individual experiences interact. Formal rules and regulations (such as technical program requirements), combined with informal norms and expectations, create a common framework of language and understandings. In this section, I review the literature in organizational culture relevant to understanding the lived conditions of athletes in high-performance sport organizations. As some of this literature concerns corporate management and non-sport organizations, I endeavour to illustrate the formal theoretical points with examples from figure skating and high-performance sport, as appropriate to the context.

Organizational culture researchers focus on symbolism (e.g., of rituals, myths, stories and legends), meanings, and interpretations of events, ideas, and experiences within organizations (Alvesson, 2002; Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985). Pettigrew (1979) formally introduced the term "organizational culture" to describe the system of "publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time" (p. 2). The shared meanings and assumptions within a culture lead to a base understanding about how an organization operates (Pettigrew, 1979).

2.3.1 Three levels of culture: Artifacts, values, and basic assumptions.

Schein (1985), one of the early researchers in the field, conceptualized three levels of culture: Artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. Artifacts give insight into organizational culture and may include physical manifestations such as medals, clothing, and buildings as well as non-physical manifestations such as rituals, ceremonies, and competitions (Schein, 2010). Artifacts are both rich and complex, and evoke aesthetic, instrumental, and symbolic considerations (Gagliardi, 1992). They serve as a means for remembering a place or an organization even when the organization's members are not present (Strati, 1992). In the context of figure skating, whether it is the distinct colour of the ice, the temperature of the arena, or the displays around the lobby, artifacts surround and infuse the organizations making them memorable and identifiable (Mills & Hoeber, 2013a). Artifacts may also be seen as something management can manipulate to teach employees and other stakeholders dominant meanings and create an understanding of how to think and act (Brewis & Jack, 2009).

For my Master's thesis research, I explored participant perceptions of artifacts in a figure skating club (Mills, 2010). Using photographs of artifacts to elicit discussions, I gained insight into issues of power, control, and other tensions in skaters' lives. For example, one skater

explained that the door to the ice was an important boundary "so that as soon as you step out of those doors on to the ice no one else is telling you what to do, you're in charge of what you're doing" (Mills, 2010, p. 74). The skater's comment alludes to a tension between having a parent present to support her and her desire for autonomy and independence in her sport.

Values make up the middle level of Schein's (1985, 2010) model of organizational culture. Schein (1985, 2010) differentiates between two types of values, espoused and enacted. Espoused values are often stated in formal documents such as mission and value statements (Martin, 2002). They show a public audience what the group "claims to be trying to achieve" (Schein, 2010, p. 15). In contrast, enacted values are those values actually experienced and demonstrated in the organization. For example, an organization may have a written value regarding team work (espoused), while a coach continuously rewards individual achievements (enacted). Most research on sport organizations involves a significant focus on values (e.g., Coyler, 2000; Hoeber & Frisby, 2001).

At the core of Schein's interpretation of organizational culture are shared basic assumptions defined as "the emergent understandings that are created by group members as they interact with each other" (Schein, 1992, p. 9). These unconscious assumptions are the deepest level of culture (Schein, 1992) and are often referred to as "the way things are done in an organization" (Glisson, 2007, p. 739).

2.3.2 The search to 'manage' organizational culture.

Organizational culture, particularly in the 1980s, was considered by pro-management researchers and practitioners as a variable that could be controlled to increase efficiency, maximize profits, and create stronger, more unified organizations (Meek, 1988; Smircich, 1983). Research in this area focused on finding ways to manage organizational culture, often drawing

only on the perspectives of senior management in an attempt to understand the culture of the entire organization (Brewis & Jack, 2009). This approach has been critiqued for "reduc[ing] human beings to parts of a well-oiled societal machine" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003, p. 2). Similarly, a machine analogy has been used to describe the production of athletes' bodies and performances wherein coaches, administrators, and athletes are concerned about improving productivity (i.e., athletic outputs) through targeted interventions and training practices. Taken to an extreme, this approach may lead to potentially dangerous and damaging practices such as overtraining and extreme dietary regimes to modify one's appearance or performance (Douglas & Carless, 2015). The machine analogy, also reinforces the notion of athletes as cogs that can be replaced if they become injured or leave the sport (David, 2004; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003; Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). Young athletes in particular may be exploited and overworked as there are no restrictions on the amount of time a young athlete can train (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). In addition, when a coach's wages are based on the results of an athlete's successes, there is an endemic and inherent risk of exploitation where coaches benefit from their athletes' labour (Brackenridge, 2006; David, 2004; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Kidd & Donnelly, 2000).

2.3.3   Complexity and conflict in organizational culture: Alternative perspectives.

In contrast to pro-management research which sought quick fix solutions to alter organizational culture, Smircich (1983) explains that organizations are created and re-created by all members and therefore are more complex than originally theorized. Similarly, Martin (1992, 2002) explains the importance of capturing the "complexity, conflict, ambiguity, and flux" (p. 9) within organizations rather than focusing on quick fixes. Members of an organization may not broadly understand or share values, therefore, rather than looking at organizational culture from

only one perspective, Martin (1992) examined integrated, differentiated, and fragmented perspectives within every organization. The integrated perspective aligns with Schein's (2010) view of culture and examined shared assumptions across an organization's membership (Martin, 1992). The differentiated view focuses on inconsistencies of interpretations, in which there are distinct differences between perceptions of some people in comparison to others in the same organization (Martin, 1992). The fragmented perspective focuses on the ambiguity of interpretation viewing it as a "normal, salient, and inescapable part of organizational functioning" (Martin, 2002, p. 105). Through her research, Martin demonstrates that there is not one unified culture in an organization. Martin (2002) addresses varying individual perspectives through her analysis of fragmented cultures. Discussions of differentiation suggest there may be smaller subcultures with different values and assumptions within the organization (Martin, 2002).

Hoeber and Frisby (2001) used Martin's (1992) three-perspective framework to understand the meanings and practices of gender equity (an organizational value) in a university athletic department. Although they found an espoused logic of equal opportunity, they also found inconsistencies and variations of understandings of gender equity (Hoeber & Frisby, 2001). Similarly, Mills and Hoeber (2013a) used Martin's three perspectives framework to explore the perspectives parents and skaters had about artifacts in their skating club. While there were some shared perceptions about artifacts, such as the uniqueness of the arena, the participants' interpretations of artifacts such as the wall of fame were differentiated between those who were showcased and those who were not. Fragmentation was evident in members' perceptions of the dressing room. Some saw the dressing room as an open and inviting space to chat with friends, others saw it as an exclusive space limited by skill level and age, while others

discussed the space as primarily functional with no discussions of socialization. Overall, the research revealed a complex and varied understanding of the club culture, rather than a singular and common view of it.

Martin's (1992, 2002) three perspective framework is useful for understanding the complexity in organizations. It challenges Schein's (1992, 2010) research on the presence of a single integrated culture and demonstrates how a single organization may have integrated, fragmented, and differentiated values and assumptions. Her research does not however explore individual perceptions of culture in organizations, and how individuals may experience the dominant integrated culture of an organization. The purpose of my research is to understand individual perceptions of two aspects of the integrated culture of high-performance figure skating, those of performance and competition.

2.3.4   Organizational culture as a framework for critical enquiry and change.

Approaching organizational culture theory from a critical management studies perspective is a way to encourage members to reflect on and rethink dominant truths and expose potentially problematic values, practices, and norms that are embedded and encouraged in organizations (Alvesson, 2013). Alvesson (2008) suggests drawing attention to non-performativity, denaturalization, and reflexivity, three concepts explored frequently in critical management studies. Performativity refers to the focus on end results present in many organizations where success is evaluated using a means-end calculation (Alvesson, 2008) and the outcome (e.g., winning a competition) appears to be more important than the process. With denaturalization consideration is given to the historical and socially produced nature of phenomena (Alvesson, 2008); that is, naturalized aspects of organizations are questioned by "critically [exploring] taken-for-granted assumptions and ideologies that freeze the contemporary

social order" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003, p. 17). Reflexive practices require thinking critically about personal assumptions, values, and actions and the ways in which they may impact our research (Cunliffe, 2004). Reflexivity takes place at all points of the research process including development of the research project, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results. In addition to exploring non-performativity, denaturalization, and reflexivity, Alvesson (2013) recommended critically analyzing the ways in which culture is created, maintained, and reinforced through an exploration of meaning and symbolism in organizations. Good organizational culture research examines meanings associated with actions, objects, words, and rituals (Alvesson, 2013).

To understand organizational culture, we must also consider broader historical and societal traditions (Alvesson, 2013). The sport of figure skating must be examined historically to understand how rules, regulations, and norms developed. Cultural meanings "bear imprints of ideologies and actions of powerful agents" (Alvesson, 2013, p. 204) and it is therefore important to understand who is making the rules and who has a voice to change existing traditions within the sport. In these ways, studying sport organizations culturally may direct critical attention to repressive and constraining ideas, beliefs, values and meanings that have been taken for granted and frozen (Alvesson, 2013). Exploring culture must go beyond observation as perspectives may be illuminated in different ways at different times; good critical research will "try to see culture when you do not expect it" (Alvesson, 2013, p. 204).

2.3.5 'Learning culture' - the long-term impacts of sport organizational experiences.

While few scholars have explored high-performance sport through an organizational culture lens, recently, a number of sport scholars have discussed the long-lasting emotional impacts experienced by athletes using a cultural learning framework developed by Hodkinson,

Biesta, and James (2007). Through this framework, researchers offer insight into the social learning that occurs within sport organizational contexts. They describe culture "as constituted by human, often collective, activity, involving practices, interactions and communication" (Barker-Ruchti, Barker, Rynne, & Lee, 2016, p. 2). From this perspective, high-performance sport cultures are not defined as particular locations, but as practices that are constituted by the "actions, dispositions and interpretations of the participants" (Hodkinson, Biesta, & James, 2008, p. 34). This research complements the organizational culture research discussed above as it acknowledges the impact of artifacts (the built environment, language, etc.), as well as the basic assumptions, ideologies, and discourses within the culture. A further contribution of their work is that it is holistic and emphasizes the overlap between socio-cultural, structural, and situational forces and broadens previous approaches to learning that were more individualistic.

Lastly, Barker-Ruchti et al. (2016) also link the sport system to the contemporary consumer market in which it is located. This is a seemingly obvious point, but a connection that is not often made. They hold that the culture of high-performance sport is characterised by a dominant commodity oriented perspective that encompasses: "a) the intended purpose of participation in high-performance sport; b) how athletes are viewed; c) coach-athlete relationships and d) the intended purpose of training" (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p. 4). In their view, the purpose of sport is to produce results, medals and records within the market which often leads to an unequal distribution of resources including funding from governing bodies. This aligns with the performativity research within organizational culture that emphasizes efficiency and outcomes. As a result, athletes become commodities in the pursuit of measurable outcomes with significant disparities in power between sports organizations, leaders, coaches, and athletes. In their terms, "training is focused on continuous athletic progress, usually

measured with normative targets… sometimes bound by age… such instructions are exclusive and force athletes who do not develop performance according to pre-set levels out of (high-performance) sport. Lower or late learning is not accounted for" (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p. 6).

2.3.6   Studying organizational culture in sport.

Organizational culture may be understood broadly as shared meanings and understandings within an organization. Exploring organizational culture through meanings and interpretation is a way to understand historical and sociological contexts. The profound social learning that occurs in this system means that athletes carry forward their experiences and personal narratives from this period well into later life, making meaning out of experiences by sharing stories (Clandinin, 2013). A critical factor in how they continue to understand and articulate these experiences and narratives, of course, is the manner in which their later life experiences influence their perspectives. Exploring the temporality of individual experiences is therefore critical and can be done through research using narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a useful way to study experience, exploring meanings at both personal and social levels. Narrative inquirers are interested in not only the experiences themselves, but also "the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42-43).

2.4   Narrative Inquiry: A Framework for Studying Experience

To understand the experiences of individuals within the culture(s) of figure skating and high-performance sport, I look to narrative inquiry as a way to think about, represent and investigate experience. Narrative inquirers are interested in interpretation and understanding of human actions, and exploring experiences expressed in and through stories (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Since 1990, when Clandinin and Connelly began calling their approach to studying experience 'narrative inquiry', there has been increased interest in narrative work (Clandinin, 2013). However, the types of narrative research are vast and as Clandinin (2013) writes "*Narrative* has … come to refer to almost anything that uses, for example, stories as data, narrative or story as representational form, narrative as content analysis, narrative as structure, and so forth" (p. 11, italics in original). It is therefore important to understand the distinction between narrative inquiry as a way of learning about and understanding experience, and narratives as a way of presenting research findings. In this project, I look to narrative inquiry as both a theory and a method; it is both a way of understanding experience and a methodology for studying experience (Clandinin, 2013). That is, I am not only interested in using stories and narratives as a way to collect and present 'data' but I am also interested in how these stories help us understand the contextual lived experiences of participants.

Narrative inquiry encompasses a move away from a positivistic, realist perspective of objectivity toward a research perspective that focuses on interpretation and the understanding of meaning (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). At the core of this approach is an understanding of the researcher - participant relationship as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) explain, "… narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other and that both parties will change in the encounter" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 9).

Clandinin and colleagues have been researching the nature of human experience since the 1980s, drawing on a Deweyan perspective.

In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it. (Dewey, 1981, as cited in Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) draw on two main aspects of experience as examined by Dewey: interaction and continuity. Interaction refers to the ways in which experience is relational. People live in relation to the social context surrounding them; they interact with others, and they experience their lives in relation to everything around them. Therefore, when attempting to understand lived experience it is important to understand both the personal and the relational component of experience. Continuity refers to the ways in which one experience grows out of another experience. "Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum – the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future – each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Stories are a way of understanding experience "a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2003, p. 477). People live multiple stories: the stories they tell others about themselves, the stories they tell themselves, and the stories others tell about them. In this way, stories come to shape the lives and experiences of individuals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Through storytelling, individuals learn about themselves as they navigate how they will tell their stories to others (Phoenix, Smith, & Sparkes, 2007, p. 235). Narrative inquiry is a way to study individuals' stories over time and can help us understand the subjective and complex worlds of individuals and groups (Smith, 2010).

Building on the Deweyan view of experience, narrative inquirers work within a three-dimensional narrative space considering temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Every story has a past, present, and future, has both personal and social dimensions, and is located within a specific place. 'Thinking narratively' in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) terms, involves exploring stories in these three ways.

2.4.1 Temporality.

Stories are not static; those who tell them are continuing to experience the story and reflecting upon their life as they "explain themselves to others" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). Thinking narratively, we must consider the ways each experience will grow out of past experiences and be interpreted differently based on an imagined future. For example, depending on the goals and expectations skaters may experience a fourth place finish very differently. At the start of a career, a fourth place might be viewed positively. Later in a career, fourth place might be viewed as a disappointment.

2.4.2 Sociality.

Narrative inquirers must explore the personal and social conditions surrounding the story, moving inward to consider emotions, internal beliefs, and understandings of the storyteller, as well as outward in order to recognize the conditions within which the story takes place (Clandinin, 2013). Social conditions include the culture(s), grand narratives, and institutional stories surrounding the storyteller. For example, when a skater is telling a story about being yelled at by a coach for wearing jeans to skating, it is important to understand the social conditions of the sport culture including the rules, regulations, and norms of the sport. Many clubs have specific 'no jeans' rules, aligning with the broader norm of wearing form fitting clothes in practice as skaters are continuously evaluated as if they were performing (Grenfell &

Rinehart, 2003). These cultural and institutional stories influence the situation from a social perspective. However, we must also understand the emotions of the skater and how they interpret the rules and regulations (e.g., Did they interpret jeans as form fitting?), as well as whether they feel the coach is being fair (e.g., Is this the only time the skater has come unprepared?), and what initiated the incident (e.g., Did the skater forget regular work out clothing at home? Was she wearing the jeans in protest?).

2.4.3 Place.

Narrative inquirers consider experiences as located within a place. Place refers to the physical location(s) of the story and where the story is being told (Clandinin, 2013). Gubrium and Holstein (2008) refer to this as the narrative environment: "Stories are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, with a variety of consequences for those concerned" (p. 247). The environment may shape the story that is told and how the story is interpreted, therefore it is important to consider narratives in the place within which they are located. As Smith (2007) explains, "the context, setting, audience, the particular situated purpose of a story, tellability, and the narrative resources available to tellers frame *what* might be said and *how* it can be narrated" (p. 391).

2.4.4 Thinking with stories.

As previously discussed, an important element within narrative inquiry is an underlying focus on interpretation and understanding of meaning where the research is not seen as an external objective finding, rather a process of learning about experience. Without depth and contextualization of personal stories within the broader culture, narrative work falls short of its potential (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Atkinson and Delamont (2006) caution against using stories and narratives as representations of truth or with the belief that they provide an authentic

view of reality. As they explain, "All too often, we believe, narratives are collected and celebrated in an uncritical and unanalysed fashion" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 166). This critique highlights the importance of being attentive to temporality, sociality, and place throughout the research, as well as using stories to think with, a concept that I outline below.

Multiple scholars have suggested 'thinking with stories' is a useful way to understand experiences, concepts, and ideas (Clandinin, 2013; Frank, 2013; Richardson, 2000). In contrast to thinking 'about' stories, which considers stories as an object outside of the storyteller and audience, thinking 'with' stories involves using stories as a way to gain insight into the relational aspects of experiences (Clandinin, 2013). Stories, therefore, are not taken as a realist truth of experience, rather the audience engages with them in a way that "ones [sic] own thoughts … adopt the story's immanent logic of causality, its temporality, and its narrative tensions" (Frank, 2013, p. 158). This way of connecting with the story can create empathy and deeper understanding of the storyteller's experiences, as well as one's own experience (Frank, 2013). The audience may also be changed through the stories as their engagement with the story becomes part of their life (Frank, 2013).

Narrative inquiry, therefore, is more than a way of representing data, it is also a way of understanding the complexity of others' experiences as well as one's own experiences. Further to this, as Clandinin (2013) explains, narrative inquiry is more than individual experience; it is "also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped expressed, and enacted" (p. 18). As I engaged with participants and listened to their stories about costumes, competitions, coaches, and training, I reflected on my own experiences, and through the participants' stories, I understood more about myself and my own stories. For example, reflections two and three in

Appendix C explain how I re-explored my own experiences as a skater and coach in relation to

participant's stories. I was more empathetic and immersed in the stories I was hearing,

connecting with them on a more emotional level, as I allowed myself to be changed by the story.

Through this process, I was able to further understand the culture of figure skating, and the

experiences of individuals within the culture.

Within this research project, I have used stories to explore participant experiences.

Narrative inquiry as a framework has guided my research from the beginning of the development

of my research questions to the completion of this dissertation. In Chapter 3, I have detailed the

methodological approach of narrative inquiry.

2.5   Moving Forward

The purpose of this chapter was to position my research project within the current

literature. I began by reviewing the history of figure skating, noting the issues of gender, race,

and social class that are embedded in the sport. Next, I examined research related to high-

performance sport and the dominant narratives in such sports, including professional and

Olympic sports. Here the performance narrative, which focuses on winning as the primary

measure of success, was seen to be the predominant narrative in high-performance sport. While

Douglas and Carless emphasize the need to shift athlete's perspectives by giving space to

alternative narratives, I argued that the performance narrative permeates high-performance sport

to such an extent that it limits an athlete's ability to meaningfully pursue alternatives. Next, I

discussed research in the field of organizational culture and explored narrative inquiry as a

complementary way to understand the complex experiences of athletes in the organizational

contexts of high-performance sport. These two frameworks offer possibilities for mapping out

the complex ways that athletes experience, make sense of and navigate the lived social

conditions and contradictions of their sport(s).

      The research project described in the following chapters was undertaken to extend and contribute to the literature in several ways. First, I have sought to provide a unique contribution to the organizational culture and narrative inquiry literatures by bringing together two very different approaches in a single context in an attempt to better to understand individual experiences (narrative inquiry) in relation to broader cultural contexts (organizational culture) of high-performance sport (figure skating). Second, there is limited research on the experiences of figure skaters. Using a narrative approach, this dissertation is intended to begin to fill this gap and add to the high-performance literature more broadly. Drawing heavily on Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I have used narrative inquiry not only to explore experiences, but also to present them in an accessible way so that readers can also 'think with stories'. For this reason, throughout the dissertation, I have endeavoured to keep participants' stories intact as units of explanation and insight, rather than reduce them to illustrations of theory. Finally, this research extends the current understanding of performance narratives by examining the ways in which these narratives are embedded in the organizational cultures of a prominent international sport, figure skating.

Chapter 3: **Methods**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of narrative inquiry research design and outline how I have utilized this method in my study of organizational culture and the experiences of former figure skaters. I then explain the participant recruitment strategy and data collection methods I used, followed by a discussion of my how I conducted my analysis. Lastly, I discuss ethical concerns I encountered and considered throughout the research process and my ongoing reflexivity.

3.1 Research Design: Narrative Inquiry

While interpreting and telling stories is not new, there has been an increased use of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As Riessman (2008) explains the way the concept 'narrative' has been used in the literature is vast. The term is contested with many conflicting ideas about how narrative research should be conducted, and what type(s) of research should fall within the description of narrative. As Clandinin (2013) explains, to some researcher's narrative is merely a way of representing data (e.g., presenting findings in story format), however, such an approach misses out on the transactional and relational aspects of a full narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is "both a view of and a methodology for studying experience" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 9). A narrative approach can help us understand the subjective and complex worlds of individuals and groups (Smith, 2010). Drawing heavily on Clandinin and Connelly, I have created this project based on my understanding of experiences as they are related to interaction and continuity, understanding that figure skaters' experiences are not static and isolated; rather experiences are complex and malleable and may shift over time.

As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain the added value of using narrative inquiry comes only when the research explores the ways an individual's lives and experiences are developed through interaction between individuals and the world (e.g., sport organizations and organizational cultures). To understand a person's experiences, we must consider the interconnected, nested stories and contexts of individual's lives (Bach, 2007). For example, I am living the story of a former figure skater, a former professional figure skating coach, and a PhD student critiquing high-performance skating. These perspectives are made up of multiple (and sometimes conflicting) stories such as institutional and organizational stories as well as personal stories that make up my narrative experiences.

Clandinin (2013) outlines two different starting places for approaching narrative inquiry: living stories and telling stories. 'Living stories' involve walking alongside participants during their daily lives, while 'telling stories' refer to inquiries that start with researcher-participant conversations over a series of meetings (Clandinin, 2013). The researcher may pose questions to the participant, but the interview is conversational in nature with minimal structure. For this research, I followed a 'telling stories' approach by meeting with participants three to four times over the course of two years.

3.1.1   Relational and transactional understandings.

Within the context of the organizational culture-informed narrative inquiry approach I have undertaken, my research is also fundamentally influenced by critical and interpretivist perspectives. The framework I have developed is implicitly interactionist as it holds that peoples' reality is created by individuals and influenced by social interactions (Neuman, 2003). This framework also aims to take account of what is actually "meaningful or relevant to the people being studied" (Neuman, 2003, p. 76). Following Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) I am

guided by an understanding that narrative is a transactional inquiry and "the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower… [it] is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment" (p. 39). While I am interested in the ways in which individuals create realities and see the world around them (Beal, 2002), I believe there are existing power structures and cultural imperatives that must be further understood and taken into consideration. Using a critical approach along with an interpretivist perspective I am able to take account of "paradoxes or conflicts that are inherent in the very way social relations are organized" (Neuman, 2003, p. 82). As a consequence, the individual experiences of the athletes in this study are explored in terms of the existing and often problematic structures of power they encountered, including those woven into the performance narrative and organizational culture of figure skating and high-performance sport.

3.2   Data Collection Methods

A story is a portal through which experiences are made meaningful (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). We live by and in stories, with a complex relationship among knowledge, contexts, and identities. In contrast to one time interviews where the researcher as expert asks specific questions, narrative inquirers invite participants to see themselves as part of the research, collaboratively exploring the research puzzle (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This more intimate connection between the researcher and participants is developed over time and can lead to more in depth understandings of participants' stories. As Smith (2010) explains, talking to a small number of participants over time allows stories to breathe. I met with participants three to four times using additional elicitation techniques such as photographs, videos, and memory boxes to create a narrative of each person's complex life (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

3.2.1   Study participants.

During the design phase of the study, I had intended to recruit both former and current high-performance figure skaters. Former skaters were defined as those who were no longer competing at the time of data collection although they may have remained involved in the sport in roles such as a performer in ice skating shows, coaches, choreographers, or parents of skaters. Current skaters were defined as those still involved in Skate Canada sanctioned competitions such as Sectionals. My decision at the time to include both former and current skaters hinged on the potential contributions of each group. While current skaters have immediate experiences to draw on, it could be difficult for them to speak openly about their experiences for fear of negative implications (such as team selections) given that the high-performance training community is quite small. For example, Donnelly (1993) avoided recruiting participants who were still involved in sport as he felt it would be problematic to ask them to criticize their current coaches or administrators. Also, Dacyshyn's (1999) findings that participants who had transitioned out of the sport were now be able to revisit experiences, deconstructing them in a different way than those still engaged as competitors, supports interviewing former skaters.

Nevertheless, a potential weakness of interviewing former figure skaters is that they may remember less about their day-to-day life as a skater, instead recalling stories related to 'stand out' moments in their training (whether positive or negative), and they may minimize discussions about other aspects of their participation. While their critical reflection is important, many retired skaters will already have come to some definitive conclusions about their participation, framing answers based on overall feelings of the sport and glazing over specific tensions they experienced. For this reason, I chose to interview someone who was still competing who could provide insight into tensions they were currently experiencing. Interviewing a current figure

skater allowed more discussion about daily, taken-for-granted activities and therefore provided a different perspective on the culture of figure skating.

3.2.2   Participant recruitment.

To recruit participants, I distributed a poster and contact letter to local skating shops, and used my connections within the skating community to promote the study and pass along my contact information to potential participants. I also posted an invitation to participants on Facebook. In addition, I created a short video introducing myself and the study to email to people who expressed interest. Snowball sampling was then used to make further connections with individuals who met the recruitment criteria of a former or current Canadian high-performance figure skater, over 19 years of age, who competed in singles at a Sectional championships since 2000. For the purpose of this study, high-performance skaters were defined as those who competed at the Senior Competitive level at the Sectional championships or beyond.

Using my recruitment strategy four female and three male single skaters volunteered to participate in the study (see Table 3.1 for an overview of the study participants). Even though one participant was still competing at the time of the first interviews, everyone had retired before their final interview. Krista and Megan are no longer involved in the sport, however, Jared, Joe, Ryan, Keri, and Alexa have remained involved through coaching and/or ice shows following the conclusion of their competitive careers.

Participants were given a journal and a small gift certificate as a token of appreciation for their involvement in the project. In addition, when interviews were held in coffee shops, the cost of participants' food and beverages was covered.

Table 3.1 Study participants

Pseudonym	Highest level of competition	Training & Retirement	A short quote related to the participants' skating
Jared (male)	International	Trained at two different clubs throughout his career. Stopped skating in his mid-20s.	*"For me, figure skating is freedom. It's an outlet… I've always thought of the ice is my kind of canvas. I am like the brush… painting an image - creating an art piece in everything that I do. And if you watch me skate like, I'm always constantly like doing something with my arms are trying to just express who I am as a person and as a skater… for most people it's sport, you know? It is a sport, but for me it's more of, like I say, an outlet. It's something for me to just kind of escape from the real world. Because when I'm on the ice no one can really touch me. I'm in my own world"* (I-1).
Joe (male)	International	Started skating in a small town, moved to a larger center to train after high school. Stopped skating in his early 20s.	Joe remembers, *"doing skating things everywhere, even if I wasn't on the ice. Jumping around the house, listening to music, and watching skating videos"* (I-1). He described the scar he has on his forehead, *"when I was four I was doing an axel in the living room at my house, and I remember showing my aunt, saying 'Auntie watch' and I did my axel and was out of control. And then I did like an illusion[5] on the landing - I hit my forehead on the corner of the fireplace, and I just remember her screaming and I was like "oh is it that bad?" and then everybody came over and put towels on my face. That is my first memory from such an early age of four, just, doing skating moves and skating things at any time possible, even if I was not at the rink. I think I was just it was in my brain, it was in my blood. That this is sort of what you did and everyone around me was doing that, so that's sort of how it started"* (I-1).
Keri (female)	International	Began skating in a small town, spent a few years commuting for lesson before moving to a larger training center after high school. Stopped skating in her late teens.	*"I was bit of a speed demon and jumping, that was my specialty, that's what I enjoyed [laughs]"* (I-1). *"I guess I got all my jumps pretty easily, so that's probably why I liked it, I liked all – well, I didn't love the performing side of it. I was not very good at choreography and stuff. I preferred to just skate around fast and do a nice jump"* (I-1).

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[5] Camel type position where the head and foot remain in a straight line while the head dips below the hips and the leg moves above the hips.

Pseudonym	Highest level of competition	Training & Retirement	A short quote related to the participants' skating
Megan (female)	National	Started skating in a small town, moved to a bigger center. Stopped skating after grade 12.	*"I like the feeling of being out there. I like just being able to glide around and it's just so smooth and so effortless and it's just something that I'm really familiar with. And I really like being familiar with things… I figured out who I was through skating, and how to be the person that I wanted to be. So going back to that is always good when I'm feeling upset or whatever, I always like to go skating"* (I-1).
Alexa (female)	Inter-Provincial	Trained in the same club throughout her career. Stopped skating after grade 12.	*"I just remember being really excited about my lessons and learning new things and I think I just kept progressing at a pretty decent rate… I remember having a little printed plan that I kept on the side of the boards by my water. And I would like meticulously go through everything, and check them off when I did them [laughs], I was always a hard worker I think, I always worked hard"* (I-1).
Krista (female)	Provincial	Began skating in a small town. Travelled to neighbouring towns for extra lessons and ice time. Stopped skating after grade 12.	*"I seemed to always be happy, like I was at peace on the ice. That's where I was the most comfortable. I could skate in front of a thousands of people and be comfortable. To walk into a room with a thousand people I wouldn't be. But when I was on the ice, I knew that is where I was supposed to be. That's where I felt most comfortable"* (I-2).
Ryan (male)	International	Moved around during his early years skating. Moved to a larger training facility in his early teens. Stopped skating in his early 20s.	*"I just naturally loved the feeling of the ice. You know a lot of kids would be really shy and I totally wasn't one of those kids"* (I-1). *"I'm the person that loves variety, there isn't one aspect of skating that I feel exclusive to. I feel I love it all, I love the flexible aspect, because I was quite flexible when I was young. I love all of the field moves, I love to turn and do edges, I love the feeling of jumping and flying through the air, I love the feeling of rotation, I love the feeling of spinning. Spinning was something I was good at and I was also told that I can move amazingly to music on the ice…"* (I-3).

3.2.3 Multiple interviews.

I met with each participant three or four times over the span of two years. At the beginning of the first meeting with each participant we discussed study objectives, ethics, and possible data collection techniques. As Atkinson (2007) explains "the interview is *approached* 'scientifically', but is best *carried out* as an 'art'" (p. 236, italics in original). Unlike structured interviews, questions were approached in an organic way, using appropriate moments to add probes, rather than asking pre-written questions in a prescribed order. I began interviews with a life history approach where I asked participants to take me through key points in their skating careers (Bryman, 2004). I then used further probes to extend discussions around specific areas. Because the literature suggests extensive training at a young age may be problematic I asked participants questions around the age they began participating and the number of hours they were involved per week (See interview guide in Appendix A). In subsequent interviews, we explored specific aspects of the participant's experiences and stories within figure skating in more depth. For example, the first interview often included an overview of each participants skating career, while subsequent interviews spent more time exploring details of individual aspects such as training, competitions, costuming, and music.

Throughout the interview process I was aware of the co-construction of stories as I often responded to participant comments with stories of my own furthering our discussions and creating new stories and understandings (Clandinin, 2013). Understanding that interviews are never a neutral, uninfluenced space, a conversational approach can give researchers and participants an opportunity to discuss issues and dilemmas that come up in the interview, probing together about particular topics (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). This approach to interviews respects the space in which stories are told and the ways participants may frame their answers

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based on the image they want to portray (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). I noticed for example, some participants presented cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) that downplayed some aspects of their participation until we had established a rapport in the second and third interviews. Secret stories, those that did not necessarily align with institutional stories, came out more in later interviews after we had established some dialogue surrounding both positive and negative aspects of their participation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

While I have outlined the benefits of multiple, in depth interviews, it is important to consider that this type of data collection requires a large time commitment from both the participant and the researcher (Duff & Bell, 2002). Additionally, spending considerable time with participants and sharing stories and experiences may lead to a stronger connection between the researcher and participant, which can potentially intensify the researcher's influence on the participant and on the story telling and interpretation processes as well as make disengagement at the end of the project more difficult (Duff & Bell, 2002). Despite these potential limitations, I embraced this method as a critical opportunity to learn about participant experiences as well as to reflect on my own. As Duff and Bell (2002) explain, narrative inquiry may illuminate the researchers experiences as much as the participants' throughout the co-construction of interviews. In addition, as noted above, I followed a program of deliberate self-reflection to monitor my own influence on the interviews and the interpretation processes in order to account for my own connection to the participants and their stories and for my role in the storytelling. Thinking with stories means taking account of one's own stories as much as those of others, and in both these regards, I found that narrative inquiry was a highly effective method.

3.2.4   Using artifacts as prompts in interviews.

Throughout interviews I used various techniques such as photographs, physical artifacts,

and my own stories to elicit conversations, trigger memories, and minimize power dynamics between myself and the participant (Lather, 2001). Photo-elicitation, which involves inserting photographs into a research interview (Hurworth, 2004), may elicit stories that would not have surfaced without the visual trigger (Mills & Hoeber, 2013b). Photographs were found to increase participants' comfort levels, minimize power dynamics, and add expanded dimensions to conversations in the interviews (Mills & Hoeber, 2013b). As Bach (2007) explains photography encourages people to share stories. Using photographs in this research was a method to add interest for participants in addition to stimulating conversations.

Comparable to the concept of photo-elicitation, memory boxes may initiate discussions during interviews (Clandinin et al., 2009). Memory boxes, which may include artifacts such as medals, costumes, photographs, and competition protocols, are "a collection of items that trigger memories of important times, people, and events" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). Similar to McMahon and Penney (2011) who used visual prompts such as photographs and videos of participants at events, I asked participants to bring photographs, videos, and other relevant physical artifacts to the interviews. All participants responded with a variety of artifacts which proved valuable and insightful additions to our conversations enabling participants to re-live the event by revisiting the scene emotionally (McMahon & Penney, 2011).

Two of the participants, Joe and Krista, brought scrapbooks that had been made for them. Joe's scrapbook included photographs, news articles, and other information related to his first year competing at Nationals. We spent some time during our second meeting going through the scrapbook in detail. Krista had three scrapbooks that her mother had created for her. The scrapbooks were a detailed account of Krista's entire skating career including photographs, news articles, scrapbooking artwork, and writing describing various points in her skating. Our second

and third interviews focussed on discussions elicited from looking at the scrapbooks.

Alexa brought a type of memory box to her interviews. While it was not created specifically for the interview, she had a box of all her skating medals, badges, photographs, videos, and other physical artifacts from her skating career. The fact she had not opened the box in years created some interesting discussions as she reflected on the items. For example, she pulled out all her medals and laid them out neatly on the floor. I asked if I could take a picture of them. Alexa immediately agreed and grabbed her phone explaining, *"I have to get a photo of this too - I don't think I've ever put all my medals out together on the ground"* (I-2). In the box were several videos from competitions and club carnivals. Alexa was excited to show me videos of her skating and provided some commentary as we watched.

Ryan brought a few photographs, medals, and a gold pin from his skating. He explained that he kept a lot of skating stuff, but only brought me the 'special' medals that he displays in his home. Each artifact represented a different time in his skating life and he used the artifact to help tell me his stories.

Rather than bringing physical items to the interview, Keri took photographs of some artifacts she found when she was home visiting her mother. This approach gave Keri the opportunity to share artifacts without having to physically move those that were in a different place and too large to easily move around. Many of her skating photographs and awards were still on the wall of her mother's house, including a dress that her coaches had framed for her. She laughed when she showed it to me, *"The funny one is that framed dress, which mom still has up. And I said, 'okay you've got to take that down'. Like, that is ridiculous [laughs] ... 'I am 30, I think you can take it down'"* (I-3).

Most of Megan's skating artifacts were back at her family home, however she accessed

videos on her phone of her completing triple jumps. *"I was just posting this the other day on Instagram. I was watching a bunch of old videos"* (I-2). She explained that she periodically posted old photos and videos on social media. After looking at a few of her posts she showed me a YouTube video of her National championship skate when she was in her early teens.

I also explored framed photographs and a memory box of my own skating artifacts (see Chapter 5) as I reflected on my skating career. The photographs and artifacts triggered memories and helped me think through my own story in relation to stories I was hearing.

3.2.5   Field notes.

Creswell (2003) emphasizes the importance of maintaining descriptive and reflective field notes throughout the research process. I used descriptive field notes to outline the overall context of figure skating (drawing on information from interviews). I supplemented these notes with documents and programming schedules that are available on the Provincial Section, Skate Canada, and International Skating Union websites. Reflective field notes were used to document my assumptions, and ongoing analysis, thoughts, and developments as well as personal reflections that were elicited through the project (Creswell, 2003). In addition, I created reflexive notes throughout the process, noting personal stories that had emerged, feelings about the interview, and preliminary connections that I saw pertaining to literature or other participants' comments. Some of these reflexive notes are located throughout the dissertation.

3.3   Analysis in Narrative Inquiry

Analysis in narrative inquiry involves a constant process of reflection and review as narrative inquirers move from field texts (i.e., interview data, field notes, artifacts, etc.) to research texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2013). Writing becomes a process of understanding field texts as researchers consider the conversations they have had with participants in relation to the

three-dimensional research space: temporally, socially, and with consideration of place.

Smith and Sparkes (2009) identified two types of researchers working with narratives: storytellers and analysts. Storytellers interpret and analyze stories in a way that allows the final research text to tell the story. The narrative itself is designed to allow the reader to reflect on and engage with the story in a personal way. Analysts, in contrast, view narratives as data, analyzing stories for themes by reducing the story to its content and then analyzing that content. In this type of inquiry, the researcher searches transcripts and field notes for themes (often through alignment with a specific theoretical framework) and categorizes the story narratives and sub-narratives in terms of themes. My research used a combination of the two approaches, creating both stand-alone narratives about each participant's experiences as a way of thinking with stories, as well as unpacking these narratives to analyze them in relation to specific tensions within the organizational culture of figure skating (Clandinin, 2013; Richardson, 2000). Nonetheless, throughout the dissertation I have focussed on keeping participants' stories intact, which is more common with the storytelling approach.

After each data collection point, I transcribed my interviews and field notes verbatim. As I transcribed, I assigned pseudonyms to all identifying names, including participants, their coaches, and skating clubs and centres (Josselson, 2007). Each transcript was then reviewed while listening to the interview a second (and often third) time as I used the audio to remain connected to specific feelings and emotions that emerged in our discussions.

I was guided by Clandinin (2013) as I began to organize my field texts and make sense of my data. I began 'thinking narratively' to understand the meanings within the stories that participants told as I considered the stories in relation to temporality and sociality. Throughout the interview process, I looked for threads of similarities or themes in the stories I was hearing

not only from the stories themselves, but also the ways in which the stories changed over time and were given meaning based on interactions with others and the culture around them.

Using the field texts, including transcripts, artifacts such as photographs, as well as my field notes, I created interim research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interim research texts are the initial understandings of participants' stories. They may include an initial sketch of the main ideas the researcher is working through as they begin to make sense of the participant's narrative (Clandinin, 2013). Using Prezi presentation software I created mind maps of participants' lives both chronologically and based on major themes that emerged in our discussions. These were completed after each interview, giving me an opportunity to fill in missing points and to clarify my understandings at future meetings.

Guided by Clandinin's (2013) research with students who left school early, I created finalized research texts, turning initial understandings into a more cohesive and structured piece. In her presentation of data, Clandinin organized Andrew's story in terms of broader themes she was hearing from him, such as relationships, playing sports, going to school, and so forth, drawing on conversations from various points of the interviews. This helped Clandinin (2013) make sense of Andrew's story and reveal the "temporal unfolding of people, places, and things within the inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485). These texts become the stories with which the researcher and reader can think about the experiences of the actors within the story and their own stories in relation to the actor. Creating research texts enabled me to consider each interview in more depth through the process of writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

I created finalized research texts in the form of one cohesive narrative for each participant using data from all field texts. Participants' narratives ranged from 30 to 50 single spaced pages and were made up primarily of direct quotations. Additional narration was used to create a

flowing document and convey each participant's story as I understood it (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012). I used research texts to gain a full understanding of the 'storied life' of each skater organizing narratives broadly into themes. While themes such as gender, race, and class were evident, I felt the temporality of stories would best be demonstrated by themes that emphasized their lives as skaters, for example "becoming involved", "family", "training", and "competitions". Participants were given an opportunity to read and respond to the narrative, however, none of the participants chose to alter or add to the research text I had sent them. I also shared research texts with my graduate advisors as a form of peer debriefing. In this way, like Clandinin (2013), I gained insight into aspects of the story that I had either overlooked or had not recognized in their full significance. The process of sharing initial stories helped me clarify the main points I was trying to identify and helped me think through the stories in different ways.

3.4 Dissemination

In the following chapters, I present the research in a variety of narrative styles. In Chapter 4, I used a combination of literature, information from websites, my experiences along with participants' descriptions and photographs to describe the context of figure skating in Canada. I have tried to use participants' experiences to help describe various aspects of the culture, rules, and structure of figure skating. Because of the descriptive and external focus of this chapter, I was less concerned about keeping individual participant stories intact and more interested in weaving together the combined knowledge of all participants along with the literature and information from the websites.

In Chapter 5, I used portions of the finalized research texts to present specific stories from a given participant. Two or three narratives were selected to discuss each identified tension. This dissemination technique allows the reader to get a more comprehensive view of the

participant's story in contrast to extracting one or two lines related to a given theme. The tension was then discussed further as it related to additional participant quotations and the literature allowing for consideration between individual stories and discussing tensions from multiple perspectives.

In Chapter 6, I organized the data thematically and incorporated shorter quotations from participants as my focus was on the broader cultural environment in which individual stories took place. The goal of the chapter is to examine the experiences of participants within the organizational culture and performance narratives of figure skating.

In Chapter 7, I created an imagined dialogue between participants using their discussions about competitions and training, retirement from figure skating, success, and reflections on whether they would do it all over again. Once again, this kept individual stories intact allowing the reader to further understand the life of individual participants but without revealing participant-specific information, and therefore the identity, of any single individual. This method of 'fictionalizing' their accounts worked to help preserve anonymity. The conversational narrative also allows the reader to see similarities and differences between participants and the temporality of individual stories.

Clandinin (2013) reminds researchers of the importance of presenting variations and conflicts, and ways in which lives remain unresolved. In each chapter I have presented multiple stories to demonstrate contrasts, competing and conflicting stories, as well as commonalities within the culture. The goal of the dissertation is to demonstrate how the lives of the former figure skaters in my research were shaped by and in turn shape the culture of the sport.

3.5   Ethical Considerations

Valuable information can be drawn from conducting narrative research. However, narratives often include personal details, that can reveal one's identity. I was aware of ethical considerations throughout the research ensuring that I was following the guiding principle of minimizing harm and "protect[ing] the privacy and dignity of those whose lives we study" (Josselson, 2007, p. 537).

Informed consent was sought from participants at our first meeting and they were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time (see Appendix B). Similar to Ponic and Jategaonkar (2012), I revisited participant consent throughout the research. Cognisant of how the participant were feeling, as they may have shared sensitive stories from their past, I revisited confidentiality and dissemination of the data at the end of each interview ensuring they were comfortable with the ways in which their stories were recorded and presented (Josselson, 2007). I also began each follow up interview asking participants for any thoughts, feelings, and questions that had emerged since the previous meeting.

In addition to the explicit written contract the researcher enters into with the participant, the researcher also implicitly agrees to approach the interviews with respect, trust, empathy, and nonjudgmental interactions with the participant (Josselson, 2007). Being attentive to the feelings and reactions of the participants is critical to maintaining a non-threatening relationship and ensuring each participant feels safe. Knowing that my own reflections on skating have been difficult, and through reading similar literature using interviews with former athletes, I was aware that my project might elicit emotional reflections and have psychological implications (Dacyshyn, 1999; McMahon, 2010). In McMahon's (2010) research, a counsellor was available to participants if they felt the memories were overwhelming. In two interviews, based on the

content of our discussions, I inquired as to whether the participants had or would like to talk to a mental health professional about their experiences. Both participants responded that they enjoyed our discussion, but did not feel they needed to further discussion with someone else. For example, when I asked Alexa if she had talked to anyone about her feelings she responded, *"I'm over it now. [laughs] It's been like five years, no that was very, very difficult. And again, it's an individual sport. You don't have anybody to go through with. It's yourself and it's quite difficult"* (I-3). The process of reflecting on experiences may be difficult, particularly if it relates to negative situations.

As discussed earlier, all names and identifiers were removed from research texts. When I met with participants I explained that while pseudonyms would be assigned making the stories anonymous to most individuals who read them, anyone who is aware of their participation in the study, or knows specific details about their lives as a figure skater (e.g., costumes, music, achievements, significant injuries), might be able to identify them (Josselson, 2007). Because many of the participants are still involved in skating, and the community of high-performance figure skaters is small, I carefully considered the ways in which I could present stories to preserve anonymity, including limiting the detail that would be shared. For example, in some cases I removed details like the colour of one's dress or the embellishments on it as dresses are custom-made for skaters and therefore may be memorable in relation to individuals. In addition, I was attentive to the stories that I was presenting in relation to my own coaching.

3.6   Reflexivity

I have been highly involved with figure skating for most of my life. My experiences are not only what stimulated my research interests, but they also impact how my research has taken

shape. As Clandinin (2006) explains, the experiences and values of the narrative inquiry researcher are integral parts of every narrative inquiry project:

> Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational process. (p. 47)

Interactions with other people, specifically participants, become relational experiences where both parties are changed through the meeting. Prior to beginning any new research inquiry Clandinin (2013) emphasized the importance of engaging in personal reflection about one's motives for conducting the research, what perspectives one has on the research, and how one's ideas might influence others.

As a former figure skater and coach, I have insider knowledge into the sport. This knowledge helps me understand some of the culture and subcultures beyond the official rules and regulations. In addition, knowing the informal norms of figure skating helped me to engage in discussions with participants in a more in-depth and meaningful way.

The benefits I found sharing stories with my participants were similar to those of Barker-Ruchti (2008) and McMahon (2010), who were competitive athletes in gymnastics and swimming respectively. In both cases their insider knowledge not only helped them understand the stories they were hearing or scenarios they observed, but also created a more personal connection with their research participants. McMahon (2010) wrote her own personal stories to stimulate discussions about sensitive topics. Throughout her research, McMahon continued her self-exploration of thoughts, feelings, and reactions to past events alongside her participants. This concurrent exploration broke down hierarchical positioning that is more typical in researcher-participant relationships. Remembering how it felt for her as a young athlete, Barker-

Ruchti (2008) observed a gymnastics practice in a more informed way than an outsider might. She integrated her reflexivity throughout her paper, explaining her thoughts, assumptions, and feelings throughout her research and analysis.

Participants in Dacyshyn's (1999) research with retired gymnasts felt the research process was empowering and beneficial and were "pleased that someone was interested in their well-being since leaving the sport" (p. 216). Similarly, Josselson (2007) explained that most people she has connected with through narrative inquiry found interviews "healing, integrative, useful, and meaningful" (p. 559). While I intentionally avoided assuming the role of a therapist[6], participants appreciated the opportunity to talk to someone about their experiences, finding them helpful and even enlightening, something that Kerr and Dacyshyn's (2000) noted in their research with retired gymnasts. For example, Alexa commented on how it was nice to be able to talk to someone who also 'got it' and explained, *"It's nice to talk about this with someone, because [it's] almost like therapy for me too [laughs]… it's nice to have someone who critically thinks about it too, because it's not a conversation I can have with many people, unless they went through it. But no one really looks at it critically... Like I really appreciate how we've looked at the joys of it, and of the really positive aspects, but there's also room to really look at the negatives"* (I-3). Similarly, Ryan appreciated the opportunity to open up in the interviews, *"I let loose a lot more than I thought I would – It was like 'gosh, have I been drinking or something? What's going on? But, yeah [our discussion] was very good. Actually, it was really useful for me. Useful isn't even the right word. It was very enlightening and enriching to actually go through some of this stuff, and have someone be interested in how things worked for me in*

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[6] See Appendix C for my reflection on feeling like a therapist.

transition from five 'til today. So, I discovered some things about myself… it felt like a therapy

session or something" (I-2). Others reflected on how distant their lives as skaters seemed. As

Megan reflected at the second meeting, "'*that was so weird'. I haven't reflected on that in so*

long. I forgot that I did that. It seems like another lifetime… It's very distant" (I-2).

Understanding the importance of ongoing reflexivity, I engaged in regular personal

exploration as I wrote down my own stories and reflections based on my experiences as a skater

and a coach. I have included a number of these accounts in text boxes throughout the

dissertation.

3.7   Overview

In this chapter I have outlined the narrative inquiry research design I adapted for my

research with high-performance athletes, introduced the participants, and described my data

collection and data analysis techniques. In the following chapter I provide the context of figure

skating in Canada before providing three chapters of analysis followed by a final discussion

chapter.

Chapter 4: **Figure Skating in Canada - The Lived Context**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of some of the technical aspects of figure skating in Canada, including the rules, skills, and related terminology, to provide context to the athletes' stories and my analysis. Where appropriate I use the study participants' statements and my own experience to help personalize and illustrate these conditions as part of the 'lived context' of figure skating. Skaters interact with multiple organizations including local skating clubs, the provincial skating body (Provincial Section), the national skating association (Skate Canada), and the International Skating Union (ISU), making it important to understand the broad contexts of skating that influence individuals in the sport. From the first time on the ice, individuals not only begin learning skating skills, but also begin a process of learning the performative (i.e., behavioural and attitudinal) norms of the sport, including what it means to be a figure skater, how to act, and what to wear. In view of these impacts, it is important to consider the program delivery and organizations as a critical part of enculturation into the sport.

4.1   Learning to Skate

While some of the participants in this study started out in community-run learn to skate programs, they quickly moved to Skate Canada sanctioned CanSkate programs. Here, children as young as three years of age begin learning basic skating skills such as skating forward, backward, stopping, and turning. As the governing body for figure skating clubs in Canada, Skate Canada offers

Figure 4.1 Canskate badges (Alexa)

standardized programing across the country. Badges (see figure 1) are awarded to skaters as they

progress through the CanSkate system (Lockie et al., 2012) and are often the first artifacts

skaters receive in their skating career. When Alexa showed me an envelope full of badges she

had earned, she explained, *"If you passed all your stuff, right then and there… they just hand you*

the badge … I would collect … multiple [badges] in the season. It was so cool[7]" (I-2).

Figure skating is an early specialization sport, where complex skills are learned at an

early age, well before maturation. As explained in figure skating's Long Term Athlete

Development model, skills become "more difficult to fully master if taught after maturation"

(Cardinal et al., 2010, p. 8). Most participants in this study became involved in figure skating

before they were four or five years of age.

Families had a major influence on participants' early engagement in the sport. For

example, Alexa and Keri were introduced to skating through parent and tot programs. Others

had siblings, parents, or cousins who were highly involved in skating, piquing their interest in the

sport. As Joe explained he was *"born into figure skating,"* spending time at the rink before he

was old enough to skate. Krista also spent a lot of time at the skating rink pretending to skate in

the stands while her older sister took lessons.

While age regulations have changed over the years, Skate Canada has maintained

maximum age requirements for different levels of competition, encouraging skaters to move

through the introductory levels quickly. For example, this system ensures that skaters who have

reached 15 years of age no longer compete at a Juvenile level. As Story (2011) observes, age

restrictions limit the competitive opportunities for skaters who start their careers later or progress

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[7] Interviews are labelled based on the order in which they were conducted. I-1 = first; I-2 = second; I-3 = third; I-4 = fourth. While many participant quotations exceed 40 words, I have chosen not to place them in block quotations to increase flow of the overall narrative.

more slowly. The cut off for eligibility is July 1st, therefore skaters must be under the defined age by this date. This somewhat arbitrary date means skaters who were born a day apart may be forced into a different category. For example, in the Juvenile Men's Under 12 event a skater who turns 12 on June 30 is ineligible to compete, while a skater who turns 12 on July 2nd will remain eligible for one more season. Jared was aware of his 'late start' as he explained, "*I always felt like I was the one catching up, the late bloomer. Especially competing against some kids who were… 17 or 18, and started working on quads when they are 13 or 14… I always felt like I had to play catch-up, even when I was on top of the podium... for me starting late also played into the fact that I only had one year Juvenile, because there was an age cut off. So, I didn't have the opportunity to stay in, to kind of craft anything… If I was born in July I would also get an extra season in the Jr Grand Prix series*" (I-2).

Ryan also felt a pressure to stay young and 'fight off age' throughout his career, *"You don't feel like a spring chicken. Because there are 17 year olds that are coming up behind you and then it just starts to become a hamster on a wheel. I was always older. I always felt older. I started feeling older around the time of the double axel"* (I-1). Ryan believed that, for him opportunities were limited for skaters who were older, regardless of their ability. *"I mean they never would say 'you are too old, stop bothering us'. They never would say that, but they can't really say it. They can just react that way"* (Ryan, I-2). While Jared's example outlines concerns with age based on written rules and regulations, Ryan's example presents some of the informal implications of age on the development of athletes.

While some participants believed that an early start helps skaters develop complex skills when they are young, others explained the benefits of starting later. For example, when skaters are very young it is difficult to be vocal about their participation. Megan explained that skaters

who are a bit older may have a more mature mentality that could help with the coach-athlete relationship, *"I think you start to gain a little bit more maturity and a better relationship with your coaches - that you can communicate. Whereas when you're young it's like this is how it's done and this is how you're going to do it. There's not really any going other paths, other ways"* (Megan, I-1). In addition, as Jared explained, playing catch-up meant he was still always motivated when other skaters might be getting bored.

4.2   Test System

The ISU and national governing bodies have established standardized tests for skaters around the world. Kestnbaum (2003) suggests these tests provide a basis to measure individuals against each other and to create homogeneity within a culture of constant comparison and measurement. Historically, it was these tests that provided acceptance into elite social clubs (Adams, 2011).

Once a skater begins private lessons they move from the badge system, where skaters are evaluated by their coach, to a test system where judges evaluate them. There are four main skating disciplines: ice dance, skating skills, freeskate, and interpretive[8]. Ice dance focuses on musicality, timing, and rhythm as skaters perform set patterns with a partner, while the skating skills discipline focuses on edges and turns. Single and pairs skaters compete in freeskate which includes jumps, spins, footwork, field movements, and connecting steps usually performed to music. The interpretive discipline focuses on the skaters' ability to interpret music. Skating skills, ice dance and freeskate disciplines are comprised of Preliminary, Junior Bronze, Senior Bronze, Junior Silver, Senior Silver, and Gold test levels, while the interpretive discipline

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[8] 'Artistic' tests were introduced in the late 1980s and then later renamed interpretive.

includes Introductory, Bronze, Silver, and Gold test levels. As skaters progress through Skate

Canada tests they may also receive[9] badges and medallions in recognition of their

accomplishments. When a skater completes a Gold test, Skate Canada awards the skater with a

gold pin and certificate signed by the president of Skate Canada (see figures 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

Skaters often refer to achieving their Gold tests colloquially as attaining their 'Gold feet'. This is

Figure 4.3 Gold pins (Alexa)

Figure 4.2 Framed certificates and pins (Cathy)

a point of pride for skaters and something I remember vividly from my own skating experience.

I collected medallions for each test and when I received my Gold certificates and pins my parents

and I framed them and put them on display.

All participants in this study had achieved their Gold freeskate test, but not everyone had

completed Gold skills, ice dance, or interpretive tests. Those who trained in larger centers often

specialized in freeskate at a young age and only learned dance or skills as a way to improve

edges, turns, and posture if their coach saw a deficit in their ability. In contrast, skaters who

started in smaller centers often learned skating skills and ice dance alongside freeskate. While

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[9] CanSkate badges are usually given to skaters free of charge (the club covers the cost), however, test badges and medallions are often paid for directly by the skater with some club exceptions.

both groups of skaters often commented that these disciplines where boring, skaters from smaller

centers were expected to practice and test in these areas.

As discussed in Chapter 2, figures, once a staple of the sport, were phased out from

competition and the test system. Figures involved creating intricate designs on the ice and

required many hours of practice. Skills were intended to replace figures, teaching edges and

turns, however, they are done with more speed and less emphasis on the precise design left on

the ice. Because there was less focus on the intricate designs, skills took less time to master as

Ryan revealed, it was much easier to complete a Gold skills test. *"I ended up getting to my 4th*

[figure] I think. I was just about to start the 5th [of 8], and then I think within 6 months I had

Gold skills. Just equate that in your mind. A big difference" (I-1).

4.3   Competitive vs STARskate System

In Canada, there are two streams of participation for individuals to choose from:

Competitive skate and STARskate. Competitive skate incorporates a series of additional tests

and other training opportunities to help talented and dedicated skaters develop into strong

competitors (Skate Canada, 2015). Skaters specialize in singles, pairs, or dance disciplines.

Those who have passed a competitive test, and meet the age requirements for the level, may

compete in Provincial competitions in October and November of each year. In some provinces,

skaters must first qualify to make it to Provincial championships referred to as Sectionals or

Sections. Provincial championships include Pre Juvenile, Juvenile, Pre Novice, Novice, Junior,

and Senior levels of competition. Skaters at Pre Novice and higher levels can then qualify for

the Skate Canada Challenge[10] which is held in early December each year. National

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[10] Skate Canada Challenge was previously known as Divisionals (or Divs for short).

championships are held in late January for skaters in Novice, Junior, and Senior[11]. Skaters at the

Senior Competitive level may then advance to the Junior Worlds[12] or Worlds[13] which are held in

March each year. Skaters at a Novice level and higher may also be invited to Grand Prix or other

international invitational events[14].

STARSkate (**S**kills, **T**ests, **A**chievement, **R**ecognition) offers opportunities for skaters of

all ages to develop fundamental figure skating skills in the areas of ice dance, skating skills,

freeskate, and interpretive skating (Skate Canada, 2015). The STARskate stream is often

referred to as the recreational stream, however, skaters still compete at local, provincial, and

national levels. Top level skaters in this system compete in a 'triathlon' event which

incorporates skills, interpretive, and freeskate providing skaters who are not strong at jumping an

opportunity to excel. Many competitive skaters see jumping as the most important variable of

skating ability, creating a hierarchy between systems as Megan, Krista, and Alexa all discussed.

Megan explained the STARskate system was good for those who did not like competition or

were not strong jumpers, like her cousin who competed in Gold triathlon, who loved to skate and

was an amazing performer. Similarly, Krista explained the difference between her and her sister,

"*I really loved to compete myself, my dream was Canadians and hers wasn't* (I-1)… *She really*

liked… being involved but she didn't like the competition aspect of it as much as I did. So she

went test stream" (I-2). When I asked Alexa if she considered skating in the STARskate

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[11] 1998-2010 Juvenile & Pre Novice levels advanced to Junior Nationals.

[12] In International Junior Competitions and International Skating Union (ISU) Junior Championships a Junior is a skater who must have reached at least the age of 13 and must not have reached the age of 19.

[13] In International "Senior" Competitions, ISU Senior Championships and the Olympic Winter Games only skaters who have reached at least the age of 15 before July 1st preceding the events may compete.

[14] In International Novice Competitions, a Novice is a skater who has reached at least the age of ten but has not yet reached the age of 14.

triathlon event she carefully considered her words as she tried to explain why she would not, "*Well, it's almost like… playing in the NHL, and then going and playing house hockey… It would just feel so wrong … I think I would be embarrassed, that's what it would be. I would be like 'ugh, you come from that competitive side and… now you are just mediocre?'*" (Alexa, I-3).

4.4   Being Involved and Becoming Elite

> *As I listened to the participants' comments on test and competitive streams, I reflected on my personal experience as a coach in a club with more STARskaters than Competitive skaters. Regardless of which stream skaters competed in, their commitment and love for the sport was often similar. In our club, training times were comparable for the two groups, and multiple skaters in STARskate triathlon made it to the national level. That said, the hierarchy between the systems as perceived by the provincial association was made obvious to me. I clearly remember attending a provincial meeting when the executive director explained the new judging system. He told us it would be a 'more fair, more accountable system' that would strengthen skating. When I asked when it would be implemented for STARskaters, he quickly dismissed the question suggesting it was not important right now. In my experience, many skaters in the STARskate system are as interested in improving, training, and competing as those in the competitive system, but choose STARskate because they cannot land a double axel or triple jumps. However, in spite of their dedication, the provincial association did not seem to value their level of participation as much as those in the competitive system.*

All participants in this study had achieved their Senior Competitive test. Throughout their careers, four of the seven skaters were invited to compete for Canada at an international competition. Five competed nationally, six competed at Skate Canada Challenge, and all participants competed at Provincials.

Participants had similar training schedules and all discussed the significant commitment required to participate at an elite level. Discussions of training resembled the 'pressured time' that Phoenix, Smith and Sparks (2007) suggest many athletes feel, that is, the "belief that time is

not for oneself, but is taken up by, or for, another" (p. 240). For example, Keri explained that the intensity of her training increased when she decided to specialize in figure skating and discontinue her participation in other sports. Similarly, Megan noticed a difference when she moved to a larger center to pursue skating. She told me skating was a lot of fun growing up, and it was more recreational back home, but when she moved to a bigger training center, "*it just became like 'dedicate your life to this or else you're going to fail' [laughs] kind of situation*" (I-1). For Alexa, she felt a shift to becoming an elite athlete when her commitment both on and off the ice increased, creating a singular focus on figure skating. At this point she felt skating took over her life, "*that's when it was like, okay I need to be eating right, sleeping right, training right, things like that. I think that's kind of when it started*" (I-4).

Many participants from smaller centers discussed the difficulties they experienced in accessing prime ice time as they had to share ice with hockey teams. This usually led to practicing in the morning, something Joe, Ryan, and Krista all mentioned. Skaters would wake up early, skate for an hour or two, go to school for the day, and then go back to the arena for another practice. For example, in elementary school Joe would skate from 6:30 a.m. to 8:15 a.m. before going to school. Once he started high school he no longer had time to skate in the mornings but would periodically take time during the day to skate on so-called 'day ice' where skaters train during regular school or work hours.

Day ice was a regular occurrence for Jared, Alexa, and Megan who altered their school times to work around training. During her high school years Alexa would go to school until noon, then skate for two and a half hours, finish her homework in the dressing room, and then

complete her evening sessions and off-ice[15] training. In total, she was trained around 18-20 hours per week once she reached a Pre Novice level. Megan would spend a half day at school, and the other half skating and participating in off-ice ice including flexibility training and working out with a personal trainer. In total, she trained approximately 28 hours between Monday and Saturday each week. All participants skated 10-12 months of the year, many only having a couple of weeks off in May and a few days at Christmas which limited family holidays.

Summer skating school was an important training time for all skaters, and those living in smaller centers would travel to neighbouring cities to skate. Skaters spoke fondly of summer skating schools as it was a time to focus on skating without the distraction of school. As Joe explained "*The most intense training time was in the summer… I remember starting at the age of eight or nine we [would] go to [a summer school in the city]. And we were essentially there from… 8:00 am to 4:00 pm every day. So we would have 2 or 3 freeskates. Maybe a little bit of off-ice [and a] lunch break. But it was understood that since you weren't in school you just took advantage of any skating time*" (I-2). Krista also talked extensively about summer skating school, something she really enjoyed "*'cause it was all about skating*" (I-1). Krista, like many skaters, would participate in a six to eight week summer school.

4.5   The Judging System

To create comparisons and measure skills and improvement, figure skating has an elaborate judging system. Prior to 2002, skaters received a score at competitions based on the '6.0' system. The score was composed of a technical mark and an artistic mark, each out of a

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[15] Off-ice sessions may include any type of supplemental training such as stretching, weight training, cardiovascular training, choreography sessions and dance

possible 6.0, based on the overall performance. Judges ranked skaters in comparison to others in the same competition, rather than evaluating and assigning a score based on individual skills completed in the program. In the 6.0 system, a skater's score could not be compared across competitions, and details on how the placement was decided were not available to the participants and coaches. Some skaters perceived the judging as unfair. For example, Krista felt that she sometimes placed lower because the judges did not know her as well as skaters from bigger training centers. Keri also discussed how the 6.0 system allowed judges flexibility in their marking, relating a situation where she had a performed poorly but was awarded high marks anyway because, she thought, the judges had seen her complete all the skills during the warm-up.

In 2002, the International Skating Union introduced a new code of points system, whereby every element in each skater's routine has a base value. A technical specialist identifies the element, and a judge evaluates the quality of the skill. Skaters and coaches receive feedback about where they gained or lost points in the form of a report card which outlines which elements received credit and how the judges evaluated each element. While this is more informative than the 6.0 system of comparative ranking, the new system is not without issues. Detailed guidelines narrow the variety of elements skaters can complete and specific elements are valued more than others, privileging specific body types and skating styles. This reinforces racialized, classist, and gendered norms (Van Veen, 2012). Within the new system, skaters are explicitly awarded points based on the execution of specific skills (e.g., powerful triple and quadruple jumps ad spins and field movements demonstrating extreme flexibility). Expectations may lead to an increased risk of injury (Story, 2011; Wickelgren, 2007) and reinforcement of a narrow heterosexual view of beauty and movement (Van Veen, 2012).

Flexibility, strength, and varied or unique body positions are all highly valued in the new system. Skaters who are less flexible receive fewer points. A number of participants in the study discussed flexibility training, particularly with their backs, to maximize the points they could achieve in spins and field movements. Keri, who did not compete in the new judging system, was concerned about the stress that some positions put on skaters' bodies. "*Some people can naturally go into a really deep layback, you can see their back just cannot do that, but you have to… That is one thing I find weird, that there are certain things that you have to do*" (I-2). She went on to discuss a common position that skaters now include where they lift their fully extended leg up to their ear, "*I don't physically think I can do that, like I think my legs are too long for my arm… we didn't do crazy positions like that. But now I would have to, but what do you do if your body doesn't do that? If you're not a gumby flexible 12-year-old? And what about when people are done skating, what's going to happen?*" (I-2). While many participants explained that the new system is not perfect, most commented on it being a stronger, more accountable system.

4.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to briefly outline figure skating in Canada. I have drawn on participants' stories to help explain some of the rules, skills, related terminology, and norms to help provide the 'lived context' of the sport. As skaters moved through the system, from their first lessons in CanSkate until retirement they were involved in a complex system of cultural norms and expectations working at multiple levels of organization (club, Section, national organization, and International Skating Union). In Chapter 5, I begin to explore some of the tensions participants experienced within the system.

Chapter 5: **Experiences of Former Figure Skaters: An Exploration of Tensions**

This chapter reports the study findings relating to the first research question: What tensions do former figure skaters identify in relation to their experience as high-performance figure skaters? While tensions are reported throughout the dissertation as a way of understanding experience, this chapter focuses on four tensions that were discussed by all participants. Themes and tensions identified in this chapter were selected as broadly representative of issues the participants themselves raised; they are not intended as a comprehensive list of tensions, but rather as examples of the complexity of a select few.

This chapter is organized around four main themes: the lifestyle of a figure skater, injuries, monitoring bodies, and financial issues. Specific tensions were chosen based on the pervasiveness of the tension expressed by multiple participants and how significant the tension appeared to be in the life of the skater (e.g., it represented a major decision or resulted in a change in their life). Each theme is further divided into subthemes related to the identified tension. First, within the lifestyle theme, I explore stories related to the commitment required to be an elite figure skater as they gave up 'normal' teenage lives, endured long commutes, and navigated changing friendships. In the next section, I unpack the normalization of injuries in figure skating and associated challenges navigating injuries with coaches and during competitions. In the third section, I explore the importance of physical appearance in the sport and specific tensions related to monitoring one's body weight. Finally, I discuss tensions associated with the high financial costs of participation in the sport.

In each section, I present two or three narratives to demonstrate the diversity of experiences and perspectives. While narratives are comprised primarily of direct quotations, some comments are paraphrased to create a more concise narrative that reflects the essence of

each participant's story. As Fitzgerald and Stride (2012) explain, "a key feature of developing a narrative is to make the story flow in a coherent manner; this means re-organising and making connections between different segments of interviews" (p. 286). That is, the narratives are not always presented verbatim, rather, they integrate multiple verbatim sections generated from data captured through a series of interviews with a single participant (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012).

Tensions are relational as they emerge as individuals interact with people, narratives, and structures that surround them (Clandinin et al., 2009). Using a narrative inquiry approach, I explore the context in which participants' stories take place as well as examine the importance of the social connections in participants' stories and experiences. Presenting data in narrative form, such as this, can give insight into personal experiences of individuals demonstrating what it felt like to that participant (i.e., how tensions were experienced) as well as highlighting normalized narratives of high-performance figure skating (i.e., how tensions were related to the broader culture).

By way of introduction to the sections that follow, I note that as I began my narrative inquiry, I noticed the energy and excitement in the participants' voices as they described skating. Their stories were passionate, with many participants using terms like 'freedom' to describe the way they felt on the ice. For example, Ryan explained that on the ice, *"There are no limits… you can just do, and create, and be, and express yourself… it's bliss"* (I-3). All participants enjoyed being figure skaters and had wonderful memories to share. However, as I explored stories with participants over multiple interviews it became clear that their experiences were complex and included many difficult decisions and sacrifices. As I listened to their stories I was attentive to hesitations and considerations as they described their lives. These contemplative moments and pauses, I noticed, often highlighted key phases in skaters' lives, reflections of past

decisions, and careful considerations of how best to explain a sensitive situation. As Carless and Douglas (2013) explain, "Moments of narrative tension can provide insight into times when psychological and sociocultural factors interact or collide" (p. 703) something many of us have learned to deny or hide (Clandinin et al., 2009). As I began to unpack these stories with participants, associated tensions with their participation in the sport were uncovered, illuminating a range of normalized and frequently unquestioned aspects of being a figure skater. These are the tensions I describe below.

5.1   The Lifestyle of a Figure Skater

High-performance athletes must fully commit to the life of an athlete to align themselves with the standards of achievement in their sport. As Phoenix, Smith and Sparkes (2007) explain, "extensive and time consuming regimes" (p. 237) are expected aspects of the athletic sporting self. These long hours and related expectations are a potential basis for tensions. Participants discussed the sacrifices and personal dedication required to compete at a high level. The three narratives presented in this section highlight the long hours that Keri, Megan, and Jared spent dedicated to their goals as elite athletes. "Skating-life conundrum" explores the tension Keri experienced trying to maintain a 'normal' life while also pursuing her skating. "Four hours – each way – twice a week" gives insight into the additional travel time and commuting necessary for some skaters trying to access sufficient ice time and the best coaching. Finally, "Everything in my life was at the rink" shows the temporal variability of Jared's feelings about the amount of time he spent focused on skating.

5.1.1   Skating-life conundrum.

Keri, like many figure skaters, became involved in the sport at a young age. Her primary focus was skating which minimized the time available to participate in other activities, socialize,

and spend time with family, a concern that is well-documented in the literature (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Coakley, 1992; Donnelly, 1993; Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003). Keri fell in love with the sport, but she was not always happy committing all her time and energy to it. She experienced tensions throughout her career, however, it was mainly after she left skating that she became more aware of the struggles she had endured during her career while attempting to maintain a regular teenage life.

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I started out in a moms and tots type program. I guess I liked it, and was good at it so I joined the skating club and that was pretty much it. When I was younger, I skated a fair bit and I played rep soccer. I really liked it, but when I was around 15, I realized I couldn't keep doing both. I don't ever remember being like, 'I'm just going to skate, this is all I want to do'. But I do remember, my rep soccer coach was kind of mad that I was away quite a bit, and he kept saying 'you can't keep skating if you're going to play on this team'. And so, I thought 'oh, I've never been forced to make a decision before, but of course I'm going to skate'. You know? I knew I would skate over soccer but I didn't know that I couldn't do both things until then. I never really thought of myself as only a skater, because I did tons of sports when I was little, but I guess that's the one that takes the most time and eventually you just drop a thing here and a thing there, and that's all you're left with.

When I was 15 or 16, I moved to a different club to work with a new coach. I wanted to skate more so I switched schools and everything for grade 11. But it was hard… I always had the skating-life conundrum, like I really wanted a normal life. You just see yourself getting more and more in this athlete-only life. I think the problem was that I always wanted to be a normal person and I knew I was getting further and further from that. I always wanted to do school

sports and stuff that my friends were doing, just because it seemed fun and had more of a social

aspect to it. I loved doing what I was doing, but I always thought 'oh it would be cool to just go

to school every day, and play volleyball after school'. When it came to the very competitive time,

and my coach said, 'you could be on the world team', I thought 'but God what would that mean?

Like, for a normal life'? I would've had to do more, and realized that was not for me. I think

that was the problem, I just wasn't willing to be completely just a skater and never have a family

life or a friend life, you know what I mean?

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In Keri's story, she expresses tensions between her desire to be a 'normal' person and the

external pressures from her soccer coach and skating coach to train more. Ultimately, she

wanted a balanced life, but to fulfill the performance expectations placed on her, she had to

devote all her time and energy to skating. While many elite athletes accept that they will have to

make sacrifices to reach their goals (Hughes & Coakley, 1991), Keri struggled with this notion.

Interestingly, it was not until after she stopped skating that she became more fully aware of how

much she had struggled with the 'skating-life conundrum'. This point became even more

evident to her as she began sharing her story with me. As Douglas and Carless (2015) explain

some athletes 'live the part of the athlete', engaging fully in the performance plot and

demonstrating full commitment to being and becoming a high-performance athlete. Keri

believed she was committing herself to the sport and the role she was expected to play. The

tension came in part from her desire to maintain social connections outside of the sport. Upon

reflection, she realized she may have been 'playing the part of the athlete' rather than living it.

Athletes who 'play the part of the athlete' move in and out of the role and may 'pass' as an

athlete, however, they may not be prepared to give up life outside to fully commit to the sport.

While not all participants discussed such a stark contrast between skating life and normal life as Keri did, it was clear that skating took up much of their lives. Often, skaters gave up other sports and extra-curricular activities to pursue figure skating. For example, like Keri, Megan played a lot of soccer. She explained how a scout approached her to join the Provincial team but she turned down the opportunity quickly because, *"they were gone every weekend, and playing games all over the province, and I didn't have time for that"* (I-2). Megan did not think about playing soccer again until later when she considered trying out for the college team, but she explained, "*[she] probably wouldn't have made it anyways because those girls would've been playing soccer forever*" (I-2). Megan's example demonstrates how the decision she made to pursue skating over other sports had a lasting impact. Because of her lack of experience in other sports Megan self-selected out of college sports.

Other participants experienced the skating-life conundrum with regards to extra-curricular activities and socialization. For example, in grade eight Alexa and her family decided that she would complete a shorter school day to make more time for skating. At the time, she was excited for the opportunity to skate more. However, upon reflection she felt that she lost the balance between developing her skills in skating and developing her skills socially and academically. "*It's really hard to say, but I think I [could have gained] a lot more opportunities, in terms of my education career if I had focused more on school, you know?*" (Alexa, I-3). While it was Alexa's choice to skate during the day, she did not fully understand the consequences of her decision until later, as she explained, *"I really wanted to do it, so that was fine, but I also didn't have anyone tell me that, you know, when you're in grade 12 and all your friends are… on the grad council and stuff, you won't be able to do anything"* (I-3). She had been very involved in extra-curricular activities like speech arts throughout elementary school,

"I was so comfortable… being able to speak in front of an audience, I loved debating [and] anything like that… [in high school] I was absolutely the opposite, I was the person who showed up and then I was gone. I didn't participate in anything other than what I had to. [I did] the bare minimum, and that wasn't really what I wanted out of my [school experience]. I think all that [leadership] stuff took a back seat and I regressed, while a lot of my peers were participating in all these things" (I-3).

Individuals living the part of the athlete may have their lives fully scheduled for them, as Lang (2010) explains:

> They report lives in which every minute has been taken up by scheduled activity – school, train, study, sleep – and often complain the sacrifices they make – to their health, the social development and their education – are too great. (p. 60)

These stories support Coakley's (1992) findings which suggest high-performance athletes may have constrained experiences outside of sport leading to a uni-dimensional self. While participants may not realize it at the time, once they have left the sport they may become aware of the skills and opportunities they have missed.

5.1.2 Everything in my life was at the rink.

Like other skaters, Jared spent many hours training, consequently, his skating friends became a second family, something he cherished. However, as some of his friends moved on to do other things, Jared began to realize there was a world beyond skating that he was missing.

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I switched coaches and training centers when I was 11 or 12. I spent a lot of time training. I guess I was on the ice about two hours to two and a half hours a day, except for one year when I did three hours. And then when you factor in the 20 minutes of solid warm-up

before each session, so that's another 40 minutes right there, plus an hour of off-ice – either a gym workout or dance. So, it's on average about four hours a day. You spend so much time with the same people that you really create a second family - because you see these people literally every day - it was almost more than I saw my own parents.

When I was younger I didn't necessarily feel like I was making a sacrifice by spending so much time skating. I think I was a little naïve when I was younger, even in Novice and Junior. I also didn't think that I was going to skate so many years! I think it just became my life. It became something that was so normal for me that I didn't question it. It didn't feel like a sacrifice either, because I loved what I was doing and all my friends were at the rink. Even when I was in high school I never felt like I was sacrificing anything by missing a party or not forming friendships. Because again, everything in my life was at the rink. But as I got older it was different. In the last year, it changed because I was the last one left. All my friends had kind of moved on and were establishing their lives with long-term relationships. One friend even got married. So, as much as I loved my last season, and was just enjoying every day, it did sometimes feel like sacrifice, because my friends had moved on or they were able to go out on a weekday and have late nights and movie nights, and I had to rest and focus on school and skating.

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Participants often spoke of limited connections with people from school, as many of their closest friends were also skaters. As Jared explains in the narrative above, he enjoyed the close connections he had with his skating friends. However, some tensions emerged when his friends moved away from skating and he was the only one left training. It was then that he began to realize the sacrifices he was making. When he was training long hours with other skaters his age

they could share the experience and intensity of training with each other. However, once he was the last person of his group the sacrifices he was making became more obvious.

Many participants' stories about friendships were similar. As Megan reported, *"I was never friends with people from school. School was always on the back burner. I did see a bit of normal teenage life, but I was never exposed to it much. I didn't even know what was happening... My life was basically planned out for me, from six o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock at night, so I never had time for that kind of stuff. It's not that I missed out on it. I don't feel like I should've had more friends. I'm not even social now, I don't know if it's because of that, but, I'm really independent. And I think being in an individual sport kind of forces that on you. You don't really need other people to make you happy"* (I-1). Unlike Jared who was the last person among his friends to leave skating, Megan was one of the first. She spoke of being happy on her own, however, she expressed some tensions as a result of quitting skating and leaving her friends. *"I miss the friends… I was always best friends with all those girls. You spent six or seven hours with them a day, you're bound to get close, they were like my sisters. When I left, I thought 'I can't really keep this going', it was hard for me to keep in touch with them because I was so upset with being done"* (Megan, I-1). The close connections Megan had with her skating friends were hard to maintain once skating was no longer a part of her life.

5.1.3   Four hours - each way - twice a week…

Commuting and travel were a big part of many participants' lives extending the hours devoted to skating. Four of the seven participants had commutes of over an hour each way to get to a training center for extra coaching, practice time, or to experience training with other high level skaters. Megan's narrative outlines her long commute to a neighbouring training center.

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In grade five or six, I began commuting to a larger center to work with other coaches. The commute was four hours each way. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning I would get up and mom would drive me four hours to skate for the afternoon and then we would drive back. My teachers were pretty good with it. In elementary school it's not a huge deal, like, 'oh my God you missed a day you are going to have to catch up'. I learned what I had to learn and never struggled. Sometimes I would do homework in the car if I had a test or something coming up.

The roads made commuting hard for us sometimes. There were a lot of times in the winter when we wouldn't end up going because of the roads. Mom was like, 'I just don't feel right about this, so you can miss today'. Sometimes we would have to stay the night in the city, but unless there was morning ice the next day we would just come straight back first thing. If it was before a big competition or something we might stay an extra day or two.

It was a long commute, a lot of driving. I think that's why we decided to move. We were like 'this is stupid, let's just either do it all the way or not do it'. After commuting for a few years, we bought a house and mom and I moved while my brother and dad stayed home. I would have been 13 or 14. After winning summer skate, my mom was like 'I think you need to pursue this', so we moved so I could train more.

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When Megan first told me about her commute I was shocked. To her this was relatively normal, however, to me it seemed like a huge commitment of time that left me wondering about the sacrifice she and her mother had made. Initially, the tension was somewhat hidden as Megan explained the commute as an unquestioned part of her week (Clandinin et al., 2009). However, after further discussions, the tensions emerged as she explained how challenging it was due to not only the time commitment, but also concerns with driving in winter weather conditions.

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After commuting for multiple years her family made the decision for Megan and her mother to move to pursue her training. While moving is a somewhat common occurrence in family life, it is usually done in response to a parent's new job. It is less common for families (or portions a family) to move in response to a child's sporting activity.

Long commutes were common for many participants. Joe reflected fondly upon the commute he did with other competitive skaters to attend a bigger training facility in the summers. *"It was really fun. Some of the best memories and some of the great friendships I still have, are because we spent so much time traveling together"* (Joe, I-2). Joe's story is counter to those who dreaded long commutes, suggesting that long hours in the car can be a source of enjoyment and fun for some young athletes. However, upon further reflection, he discussed how hard it must have been for the parents to drive so much, something he did not question as a child. *"In our heads, it was like 'that's what we did. We'd always done that'"* (I-2). Only later did he fully realize the time and sacrifice his mother, who did most of the driving, had made. This suggests that some moments of tension may become clear only after time has passed and the participant is removed from the immediate context and culture of skating a point that will be further explored in Chapter 7.

Keri and Krista also had frequent commutes for skating. In an attempt to maintain a normal life and graduate with her high school friends, Keri commuted three to four hours each way from where she lived and went to school, to where she was training *"I think [I did] 3 trips per week so I could actually go to school [at home], which I barely did"* (Keri, I-1). Krista would also travel for extra ice time. After skating at her home club in the mornings, a couple times a week her mother would drive her for extra lessons in the evening. Her home club had a short season which meant additional commuting in the spring, summer, and fall to get ice time.

5.1.4 Conclusion.

Not only are busy schedules an expected part of an athlete's life, they also become part of an athlete's self-identity. Athletes learn to live scheduled lives in pursuit of winning. Phoenix et al. (2007) explain, "Involvement in sport led the participants [in their study] to conceive of time as controllable and linked to specific 'objective' outcomes associated with enhanced performance" (p. 237). Athletes uncritically accept the investment of time in hopes that it will translate into successful performances. When one's entire life is at the arena, including friends, the behavior is further normalized as everyone is either living or playing the part of the athlete.

5.2 Injuries in Elite Sport

In pursuit of attaining new skills and ultimately performing them in competitions, many athletes train 12 months of the year (Lang, 2010). Skaters see improvement as both desirable and controllable (Douglas & Carless, 2015). However, injuries may interrupt training and disturb the development of the athlete. As Douglas and Carless (2015) warn, "if performance is the overriding goal, it becomes logical and rational to accept or tolerate injury, harm, abuse or other damage to health" (p. 85). Coaches, parents, and athletes themselves manage decisions on how to deal with a given injury. During interviews with each participant, I asked about injuries. In some cases, injuries marked a turning point in a skater's career; in others, it was an ongoing and expected part of their experience as a high-performance athlete.

I have selected three narratives on injury: "There was no such thing as injuries with my coach" introduces a discussion about a coach's responses to injury, injury management, and how participants navigated their injuries to align with their coach's expectations. The second narrative, "As any figure skater would at that level" is an example of the normalization of injury. While many skaters began by telling me they did not have any injuries, they often followed up

with a long list of injuries, some of which continue to impact their daily lives. In the final narrative, "I obviously shouldn't have been skating" we learn how Joe made a choice to compete while injured. This was a common story among participants and highlights issues around the normalization of injury and competition.

5.2.1   There was no such thing as injuries with my coach.

Injuries may be an inevitable part of sport participation, however, the expectation for individuals to persevere and overcome these injuries to reach the ultimate goal of winning can lead to unhealthy situations (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Athletes may be expected to disconnect from their pain as coaches and other prominent figures such as parents and section members, often focus on training outcomes and are sometimes unwilling to recognize injuries. In Keri's story, she discusses the challenge of managing an injury when her coach did not want to hear any excuses for not training.

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I had quite a few injuries when I skated. I was injured a lot and that was always a hard time because there was no such thing as injuries with my coach, unless you broke something and she could see it. I mean, sometimes she would ease up a bit, but a lot of the time she thought it was just a way for you to get out of training properly. So that was always very hard for her skaters. If you were hurt it was, 'no you're not, you're making it up', so you would get more hurt… or it was just miserable because you were in so much pain and you were still trying to skate every day, all day. I remember I had a hematoma for a long time. I had this sack of blood on my hip from falling so many times and I would keep going. It was just excruciating, and she would never believe me, like every time I fell - I was pretty tough - but that was just the worst… And then when it finally popped my skin kind of got indented, like it sucked in... She only then

believed me, because she saw it, but I had been telling her and going to physio for months and she never believed it. I guess people do make stuff up to get out of training, but I think at that level, and that amount of money and time who is going to go 'oh, my arm hurts so I can't skate'.

My coach would send us to a physio, but then it was kind of up to you to be better the next day. It should be gone... it's not an ongoing issue, it's just a one day thing. But that's how skating is, even if you do it properly, you get hurt and re-hurt quite a lot. The injury always comes back, just because skating is very repetitive – falling on everything – or doing the same. I had shin splints as well, and that was one of my worst ones. It meant I couldn't do sows[16] because I couldn't take off from that foot without unbearable pain. But you just can't not do sows. So I would get better for a while. I would get physio on it. I'd stop doing sows for a little while, but then I'd have to do it again, because I was going to a competition and I had to do a sow. So I would get hurt again.

I remember when I stopped skating it felt so different. When I quit, and I would wake up and not be in pain. I would be like, 'oh God this is so nice.' But when I skated I would always wake up and something hurt, I don't remember not feeling pain of some sort.

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Skaters, like Keri, are expected to work through injuries, and Keri nicely captures the coach-athlete tensions she experienced while dealing with her injury and maintaining the training regime that was expected of her. She explains how the repetitive nature of the sport, including falling, made it difficult to fully heal from injuries. Similar to Barker-Ruchti and Tinning's

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[16] Sows is slang for Salchows, an edge jump where a skater takes off a back inside edge and lands on the opposite foot.

(2010) findings with high-performance gymnasts, Keri's coach did not show compassion for her injuries. While her coach may have wanted the best for her, she felt that athletes sometimes faked pain to get out of training. The pain became normalized to a point that only after Keri stopped skating did she realize what it was like to wake up without it.

High demands of training and reoccurring injuries were common themes from participants. Injuries were a point of tension for many skaters even when injuries did not directly impact their competitive season. For example, Megan was always concerned about having 'the conversation' with her coaches. *"I ended up having to quit soccer because [my skating coach] was like, 'Megan you need to stop spraining your ankles.'… I never was one to tell them I wasn't injured though, like if I was injured I was injured. I wasn't going to [keep] skating, which was smart of me I guess. That's probably why I never had chronic injuries"* (I-1). She always took time off, got healed, and came back. Megan was quick to suggest that this was not typical of most skaters. *"I knew all my friends… would try and push through their injuries… and they ended up … with back problems or torn ACLs or big injuries… where I always had little injuries like tendonitis or inflamed tendons. Nothing too crazy and I think that's probably why"* (I-1).

As skaters are enculturated into a system where some coaches do not believe in injuries, they begin to accept injuries as a normal, expected part of being an elite athlete. Injuries become accepted aspects of participation as is further demonstrated in Alexa's narrative below.

5.2.2 As any figure skater would at that level.

Alexa indicated that her injuries were an expected part of being an elite skater who is pursuing a high level of performance. Like Keri's story, Alexa's narrative below reflects an uncritical acceptance of the sport ethic, and an understanding that skaters must be 'tough' and accept training with some pain and discomfort (Hughes & Coakley, 1991).

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Injuries were just part of being an elite athlete. I always had back problems, knee problems, ankle problems, never anything incredibly serious though, thank goodness. I never broke anything... but injuries as any figure skater would have at that level, its just part of the sport. I never had anything super serious where I had to take more than a month off skating. I was able to manage the pain through a bunch of different treatments like acupuncture and physio. What really worked for me was athletic therapy which is sort of a mixture of physio, chiro, and massage.

I had a high ankle sprain when I was in Junior which became a bit of an ongoing problem through my Senior year; it never really healed properly because I still had my training. I think it started from the repetitive movements on my triple toe. I took some time off to try and let it heal but when I came back I had to do the jumps again, so it was always a little bit sore.

When an injury occurred we'd usually have a discussion with the physiotherapist, or the doctor. They would give their recommendation and we would have an open communication with the coach. We would come up with a plan; if it meant taking time off we decided what type of strength training I should be doing and stuff like that. Both of my coaches approached injuries in a positive way, getting me healthy again and back on the ice - like any good coach would. I was a pretty tough kid. I pushed through a lot of pain, but, you know, it was just being smart enough to know when it's something that I could push through or something where I actually needed to listen to my body, and be careful with it.

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Alexa's willingness to accept pain and discomfort aligns with a persistent belief in the sport ethic that an athlete must not only accept the risk of injury, but also work through their

injuries by pushing through the pain they experience. Athletes gain respect by proving they are 'tough' and can 'take it' (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). While Alexa discussed meeting with coaches and practitioners to manage her injuries, she also appeared to dismiss or work through what she considered 'minor' injuries. For example, she dismissed injuries that I might consider significant, or that may lead to long term, chronic pain such as knee and ankle pain as minor, suggesting she was 'lucky' that she never had big injuries. In many of my interviews I asked multiple times about injuries before participants began to discuss them further, suggesting that injury and pain were normalized. Alexa's response 'you know' in relation to pushing through pain, emphasizes this point as she assumed as a former skater and coach, I would understand completely what she was saying about managing different levels of pain. After significant probing, Alexa confided that she used multiple forms of therapy such as physiotherapy, chiropractor, massage, and acupuncture to deal with the pain. In many cases, skaters treat their bodies like a machine with the assumption that it can be easily fixed and will not cause long term damage. As Douglas and Carless (2015) explain, the body as a machine metaphor provides a narrative map for athletes "subtly reminding him or her that it is 'normal' and 'natural' to hand over the keys (responsibility) for the car (their body, training, rehabilitation) and let the experts do their thing" (p. 18). Based on my interviews with Alexa, it seemed that injuries were an accepted part of the day-to-day wear and tear of elite training and competition, and that, without a broken bone, or an injury that would take her away from training for more than a month, the injuries were minor and could be 'repaired' by the multiple practitioners available to her.

Many participants seemed to accept pain as a regular part of their training to the point that it was difficult to know when to push through the pain and when to take time off to heal. As Jared explained, *"there were times where I would skate through pain and not tell anyone.*

Whether it was a back pain, or whatever, I would tell them too late. Like my ankle, I didn't tell

anybody until probably December, but I'd been experiencing it since October, and I just kept

thinking 'oh it'll go away, it'll go away.' I convinced myself of that" (I-2). Continuing his

explanation, Jared observes that while these tactics were not necessarily the smartest, they were

necessary. *"Unless I was physically broken and could not get out of bed, I was going to*

training. It probably was not the smartest decision but… those injuries… were manageable. It

hurt, and it sucked to train, but that only made me stronger in the years to come. Because I do

see a lot of skaters that are like 'oh my God, my ankle is sore or what not.' … but, at the end of

the day, the real athletes, when you look at them, there's no athlete that goes to the Olympics

who is not training without some kind of deformity or pain. It's just the way of the life for an

athlete. You just have to accept that" (I-1).

Jared's 'no pain, no gain' attitude aligns well with the sport ethic and performance

narrative. As a 'real' athlete, one must accept discomfort. Athletes' perceptions of pain and

injury are then intimately connected to the broader culture linking "one's personal embodied

experiences with wider cultural expectations of what it means to 'be' an athlete" (Douglas &

Carless, 2015, p. 126). Further, athletes rationalize and accept injury as necessary in the pursuit

of excellence (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Jared's statement "*it's just the way of the life for an*

athlete" suggests that athletes must accept discomfort in pursuit of performance, and that if they

do not, they are considered less committed to the sport and to their 'Olympic dream'. In contrast

to a work environment, where employees are expected to get well before returning to work,

athletes must navigate the tension of taking time to let an injury heal compared to missing a

season of competition. Ryan (2000) explains in early specialization sports, such as gymnastics

and figure skating, pressure may be higher as a year off could lead to the end of a career.

5.2.3 I obviously shouldn't have been skating.

The decision of whether to push through pain becomes more complicated for skaters around competition time. Missing a qualifying competition could mean missing the season, missing out on international assignments, and losing funding – but most importantly for most skaters, it can mean missing out on the very event they had trained so hard for. In the following excerpt, Joe explains how an accident during training nearly derailed his goal of competing in Nationals and cost him the nerves in his pinky toe.

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My skating was going really well leading up to Canadians - I was ready. And then I was training and I took off for a triple Lutz, and the outside edge slipped and the heel of my left blade went into my right foot. And I just remember pulling it out… I knew something was wrong. Somebody moved me over to the boards, and I just sat there and I pulled it out - and there was blood so we went to the hospital. I'd fractured part of it. I had chipped away some of the bone where the blade went… then everything changes.

I did not skate until the day before we went to Canadians. I should not have been skating. I explained to the doctor that I had a major competition coming up and they told me that it was still sort of healing, 'the bone is still floating around, and we would really recommend that you don't do anything'. But I wanted to compete because everything had been going really well. I started jumping when I was on practices at Canadians, and somehow, only in competition, I did a triple flip and triple lutz picking with that foot, and landing on that foot. I just did it on pure adrenaline... And then I got a staph infection in my right foot - because I obviously shouldn't have been skating. And then I was off for a month, because my foot was going to fall off, so [laughs]. It's fine now. Like I just have a little nerve damage, but who needs

the nerves in between your toes [laughs] – but it was an experience, it was a really unforgettable

experience.

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Joe's story demonstrates how important competing was to him. While his injury was

serious, he was not willing to take time off and miss the season. In fact, three of the seven

skaters specifically discussed competing with injuries such as broken bones or major strains.

Krista explained that she was injury prone when she was younger. *"I didn't injure myself when I*

was skating, but I was very clumsy and I injured myself off the ice. Actually, I broke my ankle

playing volleyball two weeks before qualifying one year" (Krista, I-2). This did not stop her

from competing though. As Krista told me, *"they wanted to cast it but my mom said no*

[laughs], 'she has qualifying in two weeks'. So I made the doctor teach me how to wrap my

ankle so it would fit my skate. And then after I came back we put a half cast on it and I was on

crutches for a bit" (I-2). Krista can still feel it, *"When I wake up in the morning, my ankles are*

really stiff. I have to do ankle pumps before I get out of bed [laughs]" (I-2).

Ryan also described an injury he sustained just before Canadians. "*I had done a triple*

flip, and it was not working that day. I remember I was coming down the ice and I put my pick

in, and it was one of those 'oh I'm getting mad, I'm getting frustrated.' And instead of taking a

breather and going to do something else, which I'm sure people had told me to do, I just didn't

listen. I picked in funny because I was being too aggressive. I [got] a second or third degree

sprain to my ankle. It was the day before I was leaving for Canadians. I didn't tell my coach,

and by the time I got [to the event] I was so swollen that I was having hard time walking and

standing. I was like 'please just give me an injection, give me something let me get through this'.

I remember I downgraded my jumps. It hurt to stand on that leg so … it was tough" (Ryan, I-1).

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These findings are similar to prior research on athletes competing while injured. For example, one golfer in Douglas and Carless' (2015) study described her acceptance of the risk of injury:

> I can't imagine a better feeling than coming back next week having won the Italian Open. That's what I want to feel and I am prepared to do everything I am capable of doing to get that feeling. Am I prepared to injure my body to go and win a tournament? It would appear so. (p. 76)

The participant went on to show the interviewers the injury she had received from "years of punishment" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 76).

5.2.4 Conclusion.

In the first narrative, we see how the Keri dealt with injury quite regularly. She discusses the constant stress that came from telling her coach about the injury and the daily pressure she felt to work through and overcome it. Given the pressure to train through injuries even in practice, it is unsurprising that athletes would decide to compete while injured. While Alexa's narrative presents an alternative environment where her coaches appeared to consider the well-being of the athlete addressing injuries directly and focussing on a recovery plan along with the skater, the perceived need to push through pain was still present. Alexa appears to have taken on the role of pushing through the pain as a normalized part of being an athlete. It was not a coercive power figure that influenced her decision, rather a hegemonic relationship where she adopted the normalized values and beliefs of what it takes to be an elite athlete (Crossman & Scherer, 2015). Barker-Ruchti and Tinning (2010) explain that the training culture affected the actions of gymnasts to the point that they "regularly disregarded physiological signals from their bodies" (p. 243). Like those gymnasts, participants in this study tried to distance themselves

from pain, training through it whenever possible. In sports where there is no formalized

procedure for assessing injuries (as is the case for concussions), athletes in my research appeared

to become accustomed to, and accepting of competing with some sort of pain. As Jared plainly

put it, "*there's no athlete that goes to the Olympics who is not training without some kind of*

deformity or pain". With this understanding of pain and injury in high-performance sport, it is

not surprising that Krista, Ryan, and Joe all competed with major injuries even after doctors had

suggested otherwise.

5.3   Monitoring Bodies

An interesting contrast to the ways the body is frequently disregarded and ignored in

relation to injuries in sport, multiple researchers have discussed the expectation to monitor

weight and physical appearance. McMahon (2010) discusses the body culture of high-

performance swimming where athletes learn about weigh ins, fat testing, and other surveillance

techniques as coaches continue to believe that a lighter swimmer body will contribute to faster

times. Athletes in many sports, including figure skating, endure continuous scrutiny of their

bodies in attempt maintain prepubescent bodies which presumably allow for quicker rotation in

the air (Barker-Ruchti, 2009; Kestnbaum, 2003; McMahon & Barker-Ruchti, 2017).

The constant monitoring of appearance became a tension for skaters like Megan and

Krista whose narratives discuss weight loss in relation to appearance. The first narrative, "You

don't want to look frumpy" relates Krista's experience of losing weight to look good for a

skating carnival – something she decided to do on her own. This narrative touches on the self-

regulation of weight and appearance that becomes a part of many skaters' day-to-day lives. In

contrast, the second narrative, "If I lost 5 lbs I would be a star" is Megan's experience of

coaches, trainers, nutritionists, and her mother all becoming involved in the monitoring of her weight.

5.3.1   You don't want to look frumpy or anything like that.

Similar to the normalization of injuries, there are accepted ideas about weight and preferred body type within the sport. The clothing figure skaters wear is tight fitting and for women it does not cover the entire body. This is like gymnastics outfits where the "minimal clothes [allow] maximal visibility of body shapes and forms, which in turn [facilitate] surveillance and correctional interference" (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010, p. 241). These outfits increase the instances for gymnasts and skaters to engage in self-surveillance. The following narrative outlines Krista's experience of monitoring her body and weight.

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I was always conscious of what I ate. My mom always cooked healthy food and stuff so it wasn't a huge issue. When I was skating as much as I did I could eat anything and not have to worry about it. In my last year of school I had my first two blocks open, so I would skate in the morning, burn however many calories, go to the gym for an hour, burn however many calories, and then I was back on the ice after school. So I could eat whatever I wanted during the season. But on the break before summer when I wasn't skating as much I really had to watch what I was eating. It was a big weight change in those few months that I was off the ice. It was tough.

It's hard because it's a sport where you are in tight dresses, and you don't want to look frumpy or anything like that. I didn't, because I always knew that I had to put a dress on that was going to be skin-tight, so I wanted to look good. I remember when I was getting ready [for the club carnival where I had to wear a tight unitard], I had issues - I was 13. It was so easy to hide it from everyone in the beginning because I was in school so I slept in and then 'oops, I

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don't have time to make breakfast, I'll just grab an apple and I'll eat it on the way to school'.

And I would only eat part of my snack after school because it was time to get on the ice, so it was

really easy to hide it from my mom that I wasn't eating.

> *Actually, my sister came home from college and saw me and said – 'you need to start eating, I'm worried about you, you've lost a lot of weight'. She was taking a psych courses so she asked 'why aren't you eating?' and I was defending myself and telling her I was eating. I think I lost like 20 pounds in a month or something like that. I think my mom talked to my friends because I wouldn't eat during the day. She told them 'make sure she eats lunch'. So, we would start going to my friend's house during lunch and have soup and sandwiches, and I'd be kind of be forced to eat even though I'd say 'oh I'm not that hungry' I couldn't really get away with it.*

<div align="center">_____</div>

Krista's story highlights the tensions that she experienced as she struggled with her weight and appearance in relation to the cultural expectations within the sport. In aesthetically-driven sports like gymnastics and figure skating athletes are confined by both written and unwritten rules regarding costuming (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010). Krista's comment "*you are in tight dresses and you don't want to look frumpy*" suggests that she always felt like her body was on display. For some skaters, it was coaches, parents, and trainers that encouraged weight loss, a scenario that is examined below.

5.3.2   If I lost 5 pounds I would be a star.

Megan described in detail the tensions she felt as she navigated the expectations to lose weight. Comparable to participants in McMahon's (2010) research, concerns about Megan's weight were openly discussed with nutritionists, trainers, coaches, and parents.

<div align="center">_____</div>

Skating was my life. I was always a pretty strong jumper, but at one point I started to struggle with my confidence. I was still learning new jumps but they weren't always consistent.

When things started to go downhill mentally my coaches kind of thought it was because of my weight. They never asked me 'are you okay, are things going okay in your head?' Instead they thought it was a problem with my weight. I dealt with a lot of body composition issues. I was never big, but my coach had it in his brain that if I lost 5 pounds I would be a star. So I was just constantly trying to lose weight, constantly watching my weight. And then I would come home and want a sandwich or something and my mom would be like 'Are you going to eat that?' 'Did you hear what [coach] said?' And she always went by the coaches. She always trusted them a lot, and I did too, for sure, but that was a little too far past my comfort zone.

I've never been heavy, so hearing somebody say 'Are you going to eat that?' – It made me think, 'are you kidding -yes I am going to eat this'. It was pretty intense, especially as a young teenage girl, it's not easy to hear 'maybe you should lose 5 pounds'. I definitely struggled with the whole thing. I never had eating disorders or anything, but I definitely could have seen it going that far. It got to the point that it was kind of scary. I went to a nutritionist and always had a meal plan. My meals would be completely laid out for me all day, every day, seven days a week, exactly what to eat and how many calories it is, and how many calories I'm burning. Once I was used to it, it was fine, but I remember the first maybe couple months I was hungry. I felt like I needed to eat something all the time.

I just had to follow the program and if I went off track, then it was my fault, the nutritionist had completely calculated it by calories to eat and calories spent, so she knew if I stuck to it I would lose this much weight over this long. Everyone became concerned about my weight; I would go to the nutritionist, and then she was in contact with my trainer and my trainer

was in contact with my coaches. Everyone was kind of asking me about it, and I was just like

'back off [laughs] stop asking about this'. I lost some weight for a while, but she wanted me to

be down to like 125, and I've always been 130, I'm still 130. I would kind of be around 127, that

was pretty much the lowest I could get. And everyone was asking, 'are you following the

program? Why aren't you 125 yet?'

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Megan's story highlights tension she experienced as she had to continuously monitor her

weight. As she explained, the focus on, and discussion about her weight came from multiple

sources and became a constant stress for her. While she told me she did not have an eating

disorder, highly monitored eating behaviours can lead to disordered eating and may impact

athletes over the long term (McMahon & Penney, 2011, 2013; McMahon et al., 2012).

Keri also spoke about the expectation to maintain a low body weight as a figure skater.

As she discussed, *"I lost a lot of weight when I first [switched coaches], just because I was*

skating more… I think I was probably [a] bit large when I went there. And then I was fine, so

[my coach] never said anything. And then when I got older like 17 or 18 or whatever, I

remember one coach told me, I'm okay for normal person but I'm fat for a skater [laughs]. So

then I think there was some sort of diet thing planned for me again" (I-3).

In Alexa's account of weight monitoring, her coach did not explicitly tell her she needed

to lose weight, but he made it understood that she should monitor it. She recounted, *"especially*

when I went through puberty [my coach] was very concerned [giggles a little]. He was like you

really need to watch what you eat. This is the time when you could either put on a lot of weight

or … keep a good body which is what we want. So the first few years of high school I really had

to watch what I was eating. Making sure I was staying healthy" (I-4).

Fitness testing was common for skaters on Provincial and National teams and often included weigh-ins and body fat testing. Ryan explained that he would be critical of his body: *"I remember … at one point I kind of thought that I was too broad or too big across. And I guess I was just in puberty and growing, because I had a friend of mine who is like a year and a half younger than me, and he was always talking about how he was so much skinnier than me [and saying], 'it takes you longer to get around rotations'. It would kind of bug me, and I would change my food a little bit by myself. But... then people would find out and get mad - like my parents or [my coach]"* (I-3). Ryan was frustrated that body issues were not discussed more: *"it was always seen as like a girl thing, but... guys have image issues as well. [Worrying] about how you're supposed to look and where you are supposed to be, especially in puberty, you know? It can be just as cruel and just as hard for guys in the locker rooms and stuff"* (I-3).

5.3.3   Conclusion.

In a sport judged on both technical merit and artistic impression, skaters are evaluated not only on which skills they complete, but also on how they complete them. The appearance of skaters' is regularly monitored in overt (e.g, weigh ins) and covert ways (e.g., having to wear fitted clothing). In this section, I have used two contrasting examples of monitoring weight, one where the coaches spoke openly about their concern of Megan's weight and another where Krista and Ryan monitored and altered their own eating habits to maintain a low weight[17]. Further discussions of appearance are outlined in Chapter 5 where I explore the experiences of participants in relation to the culture of performance, including music, choreography, and costumes, in figure skating.

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[17] See appendix C for a personal reflection on weight monitoring.

5.4   Financial Concerns

All the participants shared stories about the high costs of the sport, something I also experienced as a skater and as a coach. In this section, I present one participant's story, and one story of my own to illustrate tensions surrounding the cost of elite sport. The first narrative, "We understood we were not getting candy out of the machine," relates how, because he was skating, there were no extra luxuries in Joe's life, and also talks about the choice he had to make when he was younger to continue skating. In my own narrative, "It's Christmas for me too", I explore the perspective of the coach outlining tensions between trying to keep skaters involved in the sport while trying to make a living.

5.4.1   We understood we were not getting candy out of the machine.

As Wiersma and Fifer (2008) found in their research on youth sports, the high cost of participation can be a burden on families. It is not uncommon to hear of parents re-mortgaging homes to cover costs of skating or moving all or part of the family to a new city to access more and or better training (Ryan, 2000). Costs may be a barrier to participation, as expenses for ice time, equipment and coaching increase as skaters become more competitive. The following narrative demonstrates Joe's tension with these costs.

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I'm not sure how much my family spent on my skating. I just know that we understood that we were not getting candy out of the machine, we were not going out for dinners, we were not having family trips to Hawaii, we were not getting a new car, we were not getting new clothes, we were not getting all the things that all my friends at school were getting, because I skated. End of discussion. My parents made it clear to me that 'if those things are so important to you, then just let us know and stop skating. We can stop spending money, and we can go on a

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trip to Disneyland. You choose'. But - I was really passionate about skating, so that wasn't an

option.

I guess I felt a bit of pressure because of the high costs, but thinking back, only in bad

times. Like only when everything seemed to be falling apart. Skating wasn't going well, school

was going bad, and my parents were arguing. I remember thinking, 'fine, I'm just going to stop

skating so that we will have lots of money and everything will be fine' - and as a kid I guess

that's logical, you know? I was thinking, 'what can I do to fix everybody's stress? I am going to

stop skating so we have money'. That was just an emotional reaction, but it was definitely on my

mind. And I don't know if it was bad that it was there, so I really valued every single thing I had.

When I was 12 years old, dad sat me down to have a serious conversation about money.

He explained that if I wanted some of the things kids around me were getting, I would have to

quit skating. But it was an easy decision for me, 'like I honestly can't stop skating because then I

can't go to Canadians', you know? I would make the same decision again, and I appreciated the

fact that dad talked to me about the decision. I don't envy his position to have to say that to me.

Can you imagine having to say that? But it was fine. I resented it sometimes, but at least I knew

I had that conversation and that moment to decide which I wanted. Do you know what I mean?

I couldn't be too mad at them for not getting a new bike, or not getting new clothes, because I

had made the verbal decision and commitment to them - skating is what I wanted to do.

<center>_____</center>

Joe discusses his participation in skating and the sacrifices he made in his daily life as

'choices'. He was acutely aware of the cost of his skating and the sacrifices his parents were

making to help him maintain his high level of participation. He appreciated being given the

'choice' to skate, however, it would have been difficult for him to understand the long-term consequences for his decision.

Many skaters commented on the cost of skating and how the money could have been spent on something else. When Alexa was having a particularly hard time training she felt guilty about the money her parents were spending, noting that "*obviously I didn't want to be wasting their money - I mean they could be spending it on my education, or something else, right? There was one time in the summer that my mom said every time you have a bad session you're going to pay me $15 for the price of the session [laughs]. They never actually collected money from me, I don't think they ever would, but it did come up. And obviously I felt really crappy about it*" (I-3).

The financial pressures can also cause tension between family members, including siblings. Ryan (2000) documented scenarios where parents had re-mortgaged their house, lived in cars, and sacrificed everything for their child's skating. Keri noted there was some tension with her dad and her skating. "*I think he thought I was just taking [mom and I] away [from the family] and costing a lot of money. Once in a while he would come after work [to] watch for a little bit but mostly it wasn't his scene. And my oldest brother hated it. We never had a good relationship, and I think that's partly why. He thought I was wasting my parents' retirement money*" (I-1). The money Keri's parents were spending on skating was often on her mind. She explained, "*when I quit I think I said to mom 'sorry for wasting your money'. And she said 'don't ever say that, we would have spent it on something that you were doing. And that was such a good thing at the time and you got so much out of it'… but when you know how much is coming right to you in a family, you've got to feel bad, it hurts*" (I-1).

Megan, who had a large support staff including a personal trainer, estimated her costs were about $50,000 a year. "*My family has never been hard done by, but I saw my best friends*

have trouble with it. Their parents had to take out loans for them to keep skating so it was always a problem for them. So I always knew it was expensive, but it never came up much between me and my family. Whenever I would get upset I would [say], 'you spend so much money on it' and they would [say] 'don't worry about that, don't ever say that to me… it's not a problem so don't even think about it.'" (Megan, I-1).

Krista's parents never complained about the cost although she admitted that they gave up a lot for her and did not go on yearly vacations. *"They made it work somehow… I wanted to skate so we skated… my mom made all my dresses so we weren't spending tons of money on skating dresses and I didn't get new skates every year. I got them when I needed them"* (I-2). Competition expenses were particularly high for Krista as she explained, *"When I got older we had to pay the coaches for everything. A lot of times it was just me going to these competitions so we would be paying for the cost of everything[18]"* (I-2).

5.4.2   It's Christmas for me too.

The first narrative in this section explores the tensions associated with costs from the perspective of athletes and parents, however, as a coach I also experienced tensions. As Coakley (2010) explains, the increase in sport specialization over the past 30 years has led to more career coaches whose primary income is from their coaching. In Canada, skaters and their parents hire their coaches independently. Coaches then bill skaters and parents directly for lesson time. Instead of a guaranteed salary at the end of each month, coaches' income varies when skaters are injured, away on holidays, or when the family cannot afford as many lessons in a given month.

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[18] Skaters often cover all the coach's expenses at a competition, such as travel, accommodation, food, and often missed lessons. When a coach has multiple skaters, the cost is divided between them.

While coaches in larger facilities have many students, and can shift lesson schedules with other skaters, coaches at smaller clubs often do not have this option. The narrative below explores the tensions I felt in relation to finances first as a skater, and then as a coach.

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*My family did not have a lot of money, and skating was expensive. I always struggled with the fact that many of my friends in skating **did** have money. They would come with new practice dresses, their families would go on ski holidays, and they could afford far more lessons. As a 12 year old, struggling with my jumps and watching my friends improve faster than I did, I was often frustrated.*

I often felt left out when my friends would have more lesson time with my coaches. Sometimes, I wondered if my coaches preferred working with the 'better' skaters. At the time, I didn't realize that it was about how many lessons my parents could afford, not about how much time my coaches wanted to spend with me. As a coach, I struggled with having to cut back on some skaters' lessons because their parents could not afford them. I would have loved to spend hours with each of them, but I couldn't coach for free – I also had bills to pay.

My experiences as a skater influenced the way I approached my coaching. I was always very conscious of the costs for my skaters and would sacrifice my own time or income to help a skater. When I first started coaching, I didn't think much of the sacrifices I was making in my life to ensure my skaters could participate in the sport. But after a few years my perspective shifted. I remember the specific moment as a coach when I realized that I needed to start taking care of myself, and that I deserved to be paid for my time and effort.

We were heading to a competition in a city 10 hours away, and rather than flying or driving myself as other coaches did, I traveled with one of the families to keep costs down. I

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always tried to keep my costs as low as possible, especially when I didn't have many skaters competing. At this particular competition, I had 3 skaters each competing in 2 events, and I probably billed for approximately 3 hours of coaching time. I never charged for missed lessons (the 6-7 hours I would have taught on a regular weekend), so competitions like this, where I didn't have many skaters, I always took a hit financially. My travel, accommodation, and food expenses were split between my skaters. Knowing how expensive this weekend would be, I did everything to keep my costs low. This is what I had always done, and while it was not always comfortable, I knew that my skaters would benefit. Most of the time I felt good about my decision, but on this particular trip I began to resent the sacrifices I was making.

I stayed in the same hotel room as one family (mom and daughter) and I spent as little as possible on food. The first night we went to a restaurant for supper, and I ordered water and the cheapest thing on the menu ($12). The skater ordered a steak, the most expensive thing on the menu, and a $5 slushy drink. Her mom ordered a $20 meal, plus a $5 drink. That's when I realized the discrepancy between my actions and theirs. While I had squished into the back of a van for the long drive, shared a hotel room with a family, and kept my food costs to under $20 per day... the family I was trying to cut costs for was spending $30 on their 11 year-old's supper that she didn't finish.

I always found it a challenge as a coach to make a living while trying to keep the sport affordable for my skaters. I knew it was hard for parents. On many occasions I had parents explain to me that they would be late paying their bills because 'money was tight around Christmas'. I remember wanting to say, 'I know, it's Christmas for me too…' but the reality was, the alternative to me accepting late payments and keeping my travel costs low was that some skaters would have to quit the sport.

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The narrative above speaks to an under-researched part of youth sport, the experiences of coaches. When parents and skaters are trying to minimize their costs within the sport, it is easy to overlook what it is like for the coach. I remember as a skater making a sarcastic remark to my coach about his new jacket, suggesting "my last skating bill probably paid for that". However, the reality is, while some coaches make a decent hourly wage, the overall annual income, particularly of those teaching in smaller centers, is low.

5.4.3 Conclusion.

This section explores financial tensions experienced from both the skaters' perspective and the coach's perspective demonstrating the complexity of the issue. The high cost of figure skating includes cost of ice rental, costumes, music, choreography, skates, equipment maintenance, and coaching. In addition, some skaters pay for additional fitness trainers, sport psychologists, and nutritionists. As Barker-Ruchti et al. (2016) explain in relation to learning cultures, athletes are part of a commodified system of training. With high costs associated with training, athletes often feel pressure to fulfil the intended purpose of high-performance sport, winning. These costs, regardless of the athlete's success, can have an impact on families and coach-athlete relations. While the high costs of youth sport are often critiqued, there is limited research exploring the tension coaches might experience within this structure.

5.5 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present findings related to the first research question: What tensions do former figure skaters identify in relation to their experience as high-performance figure skaters? I have identified four broad themes that were pervasive in discussions with participants: The lifestyle of a figure skater, injuries in elite sport, monitoring

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bodies, and the financial cost of participation. While individual experiences varied, all participants discussed these four areas during the interviews.

This chapter was inspired by Clandinin et al.'s (2009) exploration of the tensions teachers experience. While I was interested in what tensions participants identified, I was also attentive to the tensions I experienced as I listened to their stories. For example, in some cases I was more concerned (or experienced more tensions) with a story because the participant had normalized and justified the scenario to themselves.

As Clandinin et al. (2009) explain, we must be aware of tensions focussing on the relational aspect of experiences; without awareness, "we cannot know, feel, understand, and recognize tensions between an individual's storied life and his or her landscapes" (p. 83). Throughout the dissertation, I have been attentive to the relational nature of skaters' experiences as they discuss tensions in relation to coaches, family, and friends. Participants' stories often included references to other people as they compared themselves and their experiences to others' expectations of them. Participants frequently discussed coaches and parents in relation to their tensions. In many cases coaches actively reinforced the performance narrative with a focus on competitions and winning. The performance narrative impacted participants' views on injuries, training schedules, and weight loss. For example, Keri's tension about how hard she was working was in relation to her coach's expectations; Megan's mother supported her coach's effort for her to lose weight; Ryan was worried about telling his coach he was injured; Alexa felt bad when she was skating poorly because of the money her parents were spending on her. In the tensions that followed, parents took on various roles as facilitators, mediators, supporters, or passive contributors. In some cases, parents mitigated a situation by stepping in (such as Krista and losing weight). In other cases, parents supported the coach unconditionally and facilitated

the training regime, assuming the coach was the expert and was looking out for the best interest of their child. Some parents were non-committal. However, when parents do not speak up or step in, they are, albeit tacitly, agreeing to the coach's actions, which may or may not be in their child's best interest.

The examples above outline the relational aspect of tensions, demonstrating how other people influence individual experiences. The relational aspect of tensions can also be understood on a cultural level. When considering multiple participants experiences of similar tensions, it suggests tensions are not individual issues rather they are connected to broader cultural issues. In the next chapter I examine the organizational culture and performance narratives in high-performance sport in order to further understand the root of these tensions.

Chapter 6: **Thinking Culturally: Exploring Performance in Figure Skating.**

This chapter reports the study findings relating to the second research question: How are tensions related to the organizational culture of figure skating? In the chapter, I use the concept of organizational culture and findings from research on the performance narrative in elite sport to inform my analysis of the participants' experiences of artifacts, meanings, values, and expectations in figure skating. I begin my discussion of 'thinking culturally' with a brief account of Ryan's experiences when he moved to a high-performance training centre. I then reflect on my own skating experiences and my interpretation of the meaning of 'organizational culture' in the context of figure skating. I note that a key part of the culture of figure skating is the emphasis on performance (including dress codes, personal appearance, and attitudes) in the pursuit of competitive achievements (elite performances and winning). The remainder of the chapter is organized into four sections each exploring a theme: (a) thinking culturally about organizations, (b) Olympic aspirations, (c) learning to win, and (d) attributes and artifacts of the artistic performance. The last theme is divided into four sub-themes: role of the coach, music and choreography, costumes, and personal appearance. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the cultural impacts of the performance narrative and competition.

6.1   Thinking Culturally

When Ryan moved from a small-town club to a big city club, he experienced a dramatic change from a culture of participation and inclusion to one focused on competition and perfection - he had entered the world of a high-performance training centre. As he explained, *"In a hot minute we figured out what things were supposed to be like and look like… everything... 'This is what registration forms look like'. 'This is what a freeskate session looks like'. 'This is*

what practice attire looks like'" (Ryan, I-1). In short order, he was forced to shift from a casual approach to training where jeans and cargo pants were acceptable to wear, to a more disciplined and structured practice session where the expectations of appearance and behaviour were very clear. "*In [the small community where he skated previously] it was fine to be late. It was fine to be unprepared. It was fine to dress however you wanted. It was fine to do sloppy, sloppy work*" (I-1). He quickly learned from *"parents in the stands talking, parent handouts, information on the website, the coaching staff telling us, and looking around, just looking with your eyeballs"* (I-1) that expectations were much higher in his new environment.

For Ryan, the transition to a new training center was abrupt: *"There wasn't a learning curve. It was like, this is how it is. So there were instances… I remember crying, getting sent home because I was late, and getting yelled at because I was unprepared – but you learn. I remember one time kind of slouching on the bench, and [coach] came down to the skater's area and said '[Ryan] let's go, you have first lesson'. [I yawned] and said 'ok', and he went 'you know what, go home'. And I went 'what'? [and sat up abruptly] 'oh no, no, no, no, I can skate, I can skate'. 'Go home'. And that is all he would say, and I was pleading with him and begging and crying. He said, 'phone your parents, tell them to come pick you up, go home'. And… I never did that again… that's how you learn… it's kind of tough love"* (I-1).

Ryan quickly learned about "the way things are done in [the] organization" (Glisson, 2007, p. 739). He and his family learned about the culture through other individuals, artifacts, values, and rituals at the club. In some instances, skaters are unaware that other figure skating clubs might do things differently. In Ryan's case differences were accentuated, as there was a stark contrast between his new club and the small-town club where he began skating. Nevertheless, actions and expectations quickly became naturalized and unquestioned. In order to

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take account of the historically and socially constructed nature of organizational cultures it is important to question the normalized aspects of organizational truth (Alvesson, 2008) by critically exploring taken-for-granted assumptions within the sport (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003).

As Hogan and Coote (2014) explain, organizational culture is "a social force that is largely invisible yet very powerful" (p. 1609). As participants adapt to and become literate in an organization's culture, they serve to produce and reproduce the cultural norms around them. This process is not monolithic or unidirectional; participants have interpretive, creative capacities and can shift organizational cultures. However, participants' actions work within an existing culture, therefore, their actions are always in response to the framework they know. As Ryan became a dedicated member of the club and reacted to the club's expectations, his actions, such as speech, use of artifacts, and behaviours, were played back into the club's culture reinforcing it for both current and new members. Ryan's acceptance of the culture is typical as young skaters generally modify their actions to meet the organizational expectations they encounter, particularly when they move to a new club. As Megan articulated, *"it was honestly just how it's always been done. All the older skaters were like that, and all the younger skaters were like that and I came into it as the new girl… so I didn't want [to say] 'no I don't like that, I want to do it this way'. It was like, 'I'm the new person I'm just going to do what I'm told and not piss anyone off'"* (I-1).

Participants quickly learn the norms and expectations of figure skating's culture(s), and become part of it's re-creation. One major aspect of high-performance cultures is a continued emphasis on performance and results (Douglas & Carless, 2006). In the following vignette, I reflect on the pervasiveness of the performance narrative in my own skating.

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6.1.1 Self-reflection - organizational culture.

As I think about Ryan's story of moving to a new training center, and other participants' stories, I am attentive to my own experiences of artifacts, values, and basic assumptions in the sport (Schein, 2010). I am interested in the connections between participants' stories and the cultural scripts and dominant narratives I personally witnessed and was part of re-creating (Douglas & Carless, 2006). I want to understand more about the organizational culture, but it is difficult to know what I am looking for. Reviewing my field texts and the literature on organizational culture and performance narratives I reflect on Alvesson (2002) who wrote "Culture is… a tricky concept as it is easily used to cover everything and consequently nothing" (p. 3). I wonder 'How do I explain the culture(s) of skating? How do I find the 'important' parts I want to discuss? How do I tell the story?' After days of rereading field texts, I decide it's time to open 'the box'.

A few years ago, my parents moved from our family home. I had lived there from the time I was 10 years old. As they began downsizing, they took me into the basement and asked me to go through my stuff, 'the rest', they told me, 'will be thrown out'. It was a monumental task, and a journey down memory lane. I downsized a bit but had trouble parting with my skating memorabilia (there was a LOT), so I packed everything into a box and brought it to Vancouver. Last month the box surfaced again. With my research in mind, I decide it is time to open it.

Figure 6.1 'JoJo', my good luck skating dog (Cathy)

On top I see JoJo, my good luck stuffed animal. At every competition, I would collect a skating pin and add it to JoJo's removable jacket. Next, I pull out my first pair of skates, some fake flowers, and a few medals. The skates were so tiny! It was hard to believe I had been skating since I was that small. It reminds me of a comment Keri made in her interview, "all I remember doing was skating…" (I-1). I laugh to myself as I set them aside and pick up the medals. I thought of Ryan and his "bag full of medals" that he "could do weights with" (I-1) and of Megan and her hundreds of medals on hangers in her room. I

looked down at my 7 medals, well 9 counting the 2 I received at achievement night because I had won a medal during the season. I think about my skating – was I good? Was I successful?

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Someone looking at this box might not think so. If I looked to these artifacts as a reflection of my ability, my dedication, and my love for the sport, they wouldn't tell the whole story. There are no physical representations of the day I spent learning to write my name on the ice on one

Figure 6.2 Manoburn Dam, NZ 1996 (Cathy)

foot, without stopping (something I continued to do every time I saw a clean piece of ice). The control, the attention to detail, and the precision required represented a mastery of my skill (figures) – but there was no award for that. On the bottom of the box was a dress bag that my mom made for me. I unzip the bag to see my dresses – I've only kept a few. I think about Megan's comment, "I still have all my dresses, I can't sell my dresses" (I-1). As I look at my first competition

dress, that mom had bought on sale at Sears bargain center, I realize the dress is an artifact of a specific time – a memory, a symbol, and a piece of my past… I fumble through the box and find

Figure 6.3 My first competition (Cathy)

a picture of me wearing the dress with my first medal ever - 2ⁿᵈ place - I remember being so proud! As I look at the photo I consider Popovic's (2012) autoenthnographic research where she reflected on an old competition through two reflections. In 'former skater self' she reflected on the fun they had in the dressing room doing make-up and hair and how strong her synchronized skating team had been that year. In contrast, her 'scholarly feminist self' reflected on herself as a marionette, who was "Performing for the judges. Rewarded not only for technical difficulty, also off-ice behaviour, hair, and costumes… taught to behave as a doll. No, actually a puppet" (Popovic, 2012, p.

450). As I look at my photograph I remember the music I skated to. I had always thought of the instrumental version of a song from My Fair Lady as catchy, upbeat, and youthful. I remember people singing the words to the song "I'm getting married in the morning, ding dong the bells are going to chime". I ask myself, 'Was I Eliza Doolittle getting made up into a 'proper lady'?' The critical researcher in me cringes as I realize how pervasive ideas about how to act and look were in the culture. When thinking critically about organizational culture Alvesson suggests "directing critical attention to ideas, beliefs, values, and meanings that are evaluated to be a)

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taken for granted and frozen, and b) repressive and unnecessarily constraining" (Alvesson, 2013, p. 177). These aspects of performance were taken for granted - nobody questioned the expectation to wear a dress and make-up, to look 'polished' and put together, and to look and act 'professional' from a very young age. Nobody questioned the music we skated to, and the meaning and symbolism behind that music. And most importantly, nobody questioned the overemphasis placed on competitions and gender stereotypes.

When I set down the box I realized how many of my discussions with participants were about winning, competitions, costumes, and performing. In figure skating, like most elite sports, competitions are a major focus of each season. When I coached in a small northern community in Canada, attending a competition often meant driving seven to ten hours. This is a big investment for a two- to four-minute skating routine, however, no one questioned the commitment of time and money because competitions were the culmination of a skater's and coach's hard work. Competitions are an opportunity to evaluate individual skills against other skaters and are the foundation and assumed goal of the youth sport system. Modelled after the 'Prolympic' system (Donnelly, 1996), young athletes are evaluated not on their own improvements, but their skills in comparison to others. In the more than twenty-five years I spent involved in skating, I met very few skaters who did not compete. Competing, and the focus on competition results, is a naturalized part of the sport; competitions are a method of measuring success.

Douglas and Carless (2006, 2009, 2015) have suggested that dominant performance narratives may be detrimental to the well-being of athletes, and that athletes who live with alternative narratives such as discovery narratives (exploration) or relational narratives (playing for someone else) have an easier time transitioning from the sport. They (and others) suggest the performance narrative is problematic and explain that alternative narratives are often silenced

and devalued. As an extension to Douglas and Carless's (2006, 2009, 2015) research, I am interested in understanding how the performance narrative is embedded in the culture of figure skating. In the following sections I explore participants' discussions in relation to the performance narrative and the organizational culture of figure skating, along with the tensions these conditions create.

6.2 Stories of Olympic Aspirations

Questions about winning are common in high-performance sport. Often asked in a nonchalant, rhetorical way, they are conversational questions that many athletes hear. As Douglas and Carless (2015) suggest,

> 'Have you won anything?' and 'What have you won?' are questions that every high-level athlete is likely to be asked. Winning, it seems, is of interest to people who are not elite athletes, just as it appears to be for those who are. (p. 14)

The idea that everyone's goal in sport is to win is a widespread, taken-for-granted (but not always accurate) assumption. For those in Olympic sports, the question is often extended to "are you going to the Olympics"? When I was 9 or 10 my friend and I were invited to be on a local children's television talk show. The host showed a few videos of us skating and then interviewed us. A portion of the show included a call-in segment where people (usually children) called in and asked questions. I remember my friend getting asked, "Do you want to go to the Olympics?" She responded that it was a good long-term goal, but right now she was aiming for Canadians.

I am not sure how I would have responded had I also been asked if I wanted to go to the Olympics, because at that time it had never crossed my mind. However, the Olympics are an embedded part of high-performance sport. Being an Olympian is a symbol of success and the

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ultimate goal that everyone involved in elite amateur sport is presumed to be working to achieve; it is part of the performance narrative. American figure skater Max Aaron told US Skating Magazine that his grandfather used to ask, "If you're not skating for the Olympic gold, why are you skating" (U.S. Figure Skating, 2013, p. 26). Critical of the focus on outcome, Piety (2014) observes, "It's all too obvious that Aaron is not skating for the inherent joy of it. His skating is not an end in itself; it's merely a means to the end of fame and fortune" (p. 26). In this section I explore stories that participants shared in relation to the Olympics.

When I met with Krista she showed me three scrapbooks her mother had compiled using artifacts from Krista's skating as well as inspirational quotes and 'clippings' (copy and pastes) from the internet. On one page, beside a picture of Krista at five years old, was a sticker (see figure 6.2.1). When I read it aloud *"heading for the Olympics"* Krista laughed and replied, *"I never quite got there"* (I-2). She told me that she always wanted to achieve as much as she could, adding that her
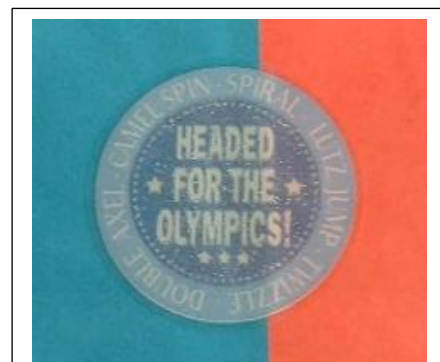
Figure 6.4 Saying from Krista's scrapbook

specific goals shifted throughout her skating, *"when I got older I think that I put my goal to Canadians, because I thought it would be attainable… at the time"* (I-2). Discussions about the Olympics were common among participants. Alexa remembers having Olympic dreams, *"I was always super ambitious with skating - I used to think I was going to go to the Olympics [laughs] ha!"* (I-2). Megan had similar dreams, and described a picture she drew in grade four, *"we had this activity and you would cut out your real face on a picture, and then draw what you wanted to be when you grew up. I wanted to be in the Olympics, and I always had makeup on and [I was] skating"* (I-1).

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The continuous emphasis on the Olympics is a source of tension for athletes and can be problematic as it minimizes non-Olympic achievements. For example, Ryan was excited to tell me about his international competition, but felt the need to clarify that it was not that big, just big for him, "*yeah, it's not an Olympic medal but it was my first international*" (I-2). Those who make it close to the Olympics may experience significant disappointment and letdown. After watching a qualifying event for the Olympics, I read the Twitter feed of Canadian athlete Jeremy Ten who was expected to qualify, "So much goes into preparing you for when you make an Olympic team, but nothing prepares you for what happens when you don't… #SadButTrue". In this case the disappointment was a notable outcome of the tension Jeremy experienced.

Children begin hearing narratives about the Olympics at a young age as people around them build up expectations assuming everyone's goal is (and should be) the Olympics, discounting the value and enjoyment individuals may find in practice, other competitions, and performances. Keri showed me a picture of an award she received and reflected on the person giving her the award, *"What did he say to me? I think he said 'are you going to win the Olympics one day?' - As I shook his hand - and I was like 'ha, ok'…"* (I-2). The question, directed at young athletes, fails to acknowledge the many variables involved in qualifying for the Olympics, such as money, training, ability, and access to high level coaching to name a few. Joe, who advanced very quickly from a young age, heard many conversations from Provincial and National members as well as the media about his future potential. As Joe explained, this approach was not helpful, "*Why do you think it never happens? Do you know what I mean? Not pointing fingers but, we wonder why we haven't achieved the Gold medal at the Olympics. Maybe it's because everybody starts talking about it at the age of 10. You know?*" (I-2). From his standpoint, the continual speculation about his success and his future was misplaced. As Joe

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explained, skaters who had been identified as potential Olympians at a young age did not end up qualifying, "*Those of us that were stamped 'that's one' 'that's one', 'that's one', [and given] money, money, money, [and] international assignments. We just ended up not being that one, but you couldn't have known that at that time. You probably would've guessed [it would be us], but no*" (I-2). Joe discussed how timing and luck had a lot to do with getting to the Olympics, "*even if you're looking at who did make the Olympics, it's certainly not the best skaters that were around at that time… just who was the one ready in that moment*" (I-2).

Stories about the Olympics are an artifact of the culture of figure skating. They are non-physical manifestations that provide insight into what is important (e.g., an Olympic medal is highly valued) and how things are done (e.g., the underlying assumption that all participants want to attain this goal) (Schein, 1985, 2010). These stories are embedded in the larger performance narrative and are shared by media, parents, coaches, and peers as a reminder that reaching the Olympics, should be an aspiration. Layered within this narrative is the meritocratic belief that individuals have control of their advancement within their sport. The performance narrative is framed as a "linear narrative which assumes people can control their lives, tending to 'down play the significance of other people and of environmental constraints on their actions'" (Ezzy, 2000, p. 616). Consequently, athletes learn that lesser achievements are never enough. They know there is always another goal, and may believe that without an Olympic performance they are not successful athletes.

Alexa reflected on her constant drive to improve. *"One thing that I regret is not taking the time to really appreciate those moments [at my peak]. I put a lot of pressure on myself, and there was a lot of negativity, when really those moments to feel joy were numerous… [but] to be a competitive athlete, you constantly need to be striving to be better. And that's what coaches*

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do, they push you, and sometimes that pressure… is what [we] need to succeed. During that

time you are just constantly thinking about what you can do better and not necessarily reflecting

on the good" (I-3). As Douglas and Carless (2015) highlight, this pressure is present even if one

reaches the top, as "every athlete knows that *you are only as good as your last win*. You cannot

let up, you have to keep pushing, striving, ever higher, ever faster. *No athlete can sit back on*

their laurels" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 18, italics in original).

6.3   Competitions

In early specialization sports like figure skating, some children begin competing as young

as three years of age. These early competitions are often focused on fun, however, they are still

competitions where skaters are compared to their peers and medals and ribbons are given. This

perceived 'need' to compete is embedded within the culture of sport and part of the self-narrative

that individuals adopt early in their skating careers (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Extrinsic rewards

and outcome-based models of sport may dampen intrinsic motivation, ownership and enjoyment

in sport (Ryan, Williams, Patrick, & Deci, 2009). The importance of competitions is further

emphasized through attention to reconfiguring arenas at competition time, reactions to winning

and losing, and attention to participants' appearance and performance, which are discussed in

subsequent subsections.

When I reflect on my experiences as a coach and skater, I will never forget the unique

atmosphere and emotional energy state of the skating arena on competition day. There was

always a buzz of excitement as skaters prepared for their turn on the ice, and an ever-present

smell of hairspray. A friend of mine told me that to this day a little spray of hairspray makes her

nervous, so when she wants to increase her alertness before a presentation or running race, she

squirts hairspray. The attention to self-decorating by the skaters tends to be linked with

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professionalism and expectations for a 'finished look' at the competition, particularly in the

presence of family, coaches, and judges. At most competitions, there are tables set up with

people selling dresses, flowers, stuffed animals, and other skating paraphernalia. At the more

'important' competitions, the traditional space of the ice arena gets reconfigured with unique

features including a 'kiss & cry' area, blue material to cover the boards around the ice, and a

raised platform for the judges[19]. Skaters enter the kiss and cry area after they skate to wait (often

with their coaches) for their marks to be announced. When events are broadcast on TV or

streamed on the internet, skaters' immediate reactions are captured. Covered boards block out

advertisements as well as scuffs and markings typically seen in hockey arenas. The raised

judges' platform gives judges a better vantage point to watch competitors and may also

symbolize power. These transformations from the plain arena where skaters practice, to a

decorated arena signify that this is an important figure skating event, and together create a kind

of sacred space that contributes to the heightened emotional state of the participants and

spectators. In addition, the event organizers sometimes add decorative features such as special

signage, lighting and banners that add to the spectacle, and if there is a media presence, the

reporters, photographers, camera crews, and flood lights serve to elevate expectations further.

As Ryan explains, there may be a downside to these various embellishments of the

otherwise traditional skating rink. *"[Competitions are] not as focused on the athlete. It's*

more... 'how glitzy and glamorous can we make this for bigwigs'. You know? The huge judges'

podium which was built for the environment, where they can sit up high on this pedestal and all

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[19] While elaborate decorations such as blue boards and kiss and cry areas used to be just qualifying for competitions such as sectionals and higher, these extra elements of decorations now appear at many competitions throughout the season.

the chairs have to match and everything else" (I-3). Equally concerning, in his view, is reinforcement of a hierarchy between skaters' levels when there are multiple arenas being used for a competition and only one arena is decorated. As Ryan explained "*you know that if you're a U14[20], you're in the bad rink, you know you are not going to be in the blue board rink, and you might have the [small town] judges you know… all that going in"* (I-2). Keri explained the differences she felt, even at a national level, *"We were in like the, kind of poopy rink, because the Senior's were in the… big rink and [lower levels] were in the smaller rink"* (I-3).

Reconfiguration of the arena and expectations on how to act and dress at competitions are an integral part of the training skaters receive about the sport. Referring to the kiss and cry area, Jared explained, *"it teaches the younger kids, it gives them an opportunity to kind of learn, because there is a right and wrong way to be in the kiss and cry. Some people … especially the girls, in their dresses, sit down [with] their legs open and poor posture, but… you're still trying to present yourself properly"* (I-2). He explained that the kiss and cry area creates more of a professional environment and makes the moment special for the skaters. But it also means that every reaction skaters make is being watched and evaluated. Jared cautions, *"you don't want to come [into] kiss and cry and look like a poor sport. You've still got to realize that there is a time and a place for all of your reactions. So, it hopefully teaches them that, behind closed doors you can have your moment but [in the kiss and cry] everybody's always watching you."* (I-2). Jared tries to explain this to young skaters, *"no matter what you're doing whether you're on the ice or off the ice, there is always somebody analyzing your actions, attitudes, and the way you display*

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[20] Even when skaters are at the same level of competition (for example Pre Juvenile level is now divided into under 14 and under 11), their age might influence what rink they will be competing in with younger skaters in the better rink.

yourself" (I-2). This heightened surveillance and attention individuals receive at competitions may enhance feelings of nervousness and anxiety.

For some skaters, performance at competitions may be made more permanent through videos. Krista's mother recorded all her competitions, "*we would go back to the hotel and scrutinize them and figure out what I could do better"* (I-1). Krista liked watching the videos if she had a good skate, but *"if I had a bad skate and I knew that there was going to be a lot of criticism, I wasn't a huge fan of it. But it made me a better skater"* (I-2). Many competitions are now streamed live on the internet for everyone to see putting skaters continuously on display. Recordings become permanent artifacts that can be reviewed multiple times and may lead to further scrutiny over specific skills, choreography, and appearance. Jared emphasizes the importance of always watching one's skating performances, *"I have awful skates that are on YouTube, but I've watched them, at least once. I think my worst skate ever is online… I've seen it once… I looked at what happened and told myself never to let this happen again. That's just the kind of attitude that you have to have about it"* (I-2).

Because competitions are a major focus for participants, vacations and family times are arranged around them. The competitive season in skating begins with Qualifiers in October, Sectionals in November, Skate Canada Challenge in December, Nationals in January, and Worlds in March. Consequently, Christmas falls in the middle of the competitive season. Megan explained that her family often stayed close to home over the holidays, *"Once in a while, if [I] didn't make it through to Nationals or something, my family would go somewhere, because then [I] wouldn't have to be skating over Christmas holidays"* (I-2). Joe was more explicit with his feelings, *"Getting ready for Canadians I remember was always very difficult, because, Christmas was in the way… and still, because of that, Christmas feels like a big nuisance to me...*

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It was expensive on the family, you had to take time off skating, the schedule changed because school wasn't happening… the fact that Christmas was three weeks before Canadians did not work for anybody" (I-1). Like stories related to the Olympics, competitions are another non-physical manifestation of the culture (Schein, 2010). They are cultural ceremonies and rituals that happen at predictable times throughout the year and must be scheduled into family times.

While not all athletes celebrate Christmas for religious reasons, children and parents in Canada typically have time off to spend with family in December, something skaters attending Nationals are not able to enjoy. Time with family is also limited during summer as skaters often attend six to eight-week summer skating schools. When families structure their plans around training and forego important family times, the complex web of meanings and values associated with competition becomes increasingly entrenched and the imperatives of skill mastery and winning (or medalling) tend to intensify. The attention this places on the athlete within the family structure, along with the time and money spent, may lead to family tensions including jealousy and resentment by siblings and/or guilt for participants. For example, Ryan described his strained relationship with his brother, *"I still have feelings of guilt about the fact that… I got a lot of attention. I didn't seek it out necessarily, like 'hey what are you doing watching him'. Like it wasn't malicious or anything like that, but we quarrelled as brothers do"* (I-1).

6.4   Learning Value in Winning

Competitions and medals are endemic to sport and are not inherently bad, however, as people interact with these conditions and artifacts over time, they become more significant and can have unwanted and perverse consequences. For example, the focus on competitive performance, results, and medals can become problematic when they are tied to self-perception and personal worth. The emphasis on 'winning at all costs' or of 'winning over others' as a way

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of understanding success is problematic for a variety of reasons. First, athletes have no control over how well their competitors will do. Douglas and Carless (2015) explain that because performance outcomes depend on factors outside of the individual's control (such as competitors) the "sense of self in performance stories is both *contingent* and *fragile*" (p. 83, italics in original). Second, the competition performance may not be representative of the individual's full ability, as happens when a skater performs on poor ice or under other adverse circumstances. Third, when one's self concept of ability (i.e., am I good?) becomes tied to external results rather than personal development, individuals risk losing sight of how they are progressing. In this section, I discuss the impacts of medals and awards as signs of achievement, together with the meaning and values attributed to them by the media, coaches, and parents.

When asked to discuss their skating careers, many of the study participants talked about medals and competition results. For example, Alexa told me about every Sectional competition she had attended, detailing how she felt at the event, how she skated, and how she placed. She also showed me a box of medals that had been displayed in her room but were in storage since they renovated the house. She reflected on the sense of accomplishment she felt seeing the medals, and how she was somewhat amazed that there were so many. While the emphasis on competitions in the interviews is unsurprising as participants were elite, competitive athletes, these stories were also juxtaposed with stories of stress, anxiety, and tension.

After a competition, skaters may return home with photographs, report cards[21] recording their placements and scores, and flowers or similar tributes that they received. However, of all

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[21] In the 6.0 systems skaters' results would be posted. Skaters could attain a copy of the protocol for their event or the entire competition. In the Code of Points system, skaters now receive 'report cards' after the competition detailing their scores.

the artifacts brought home, the medals and awards are most often displayed around skaters' homes reinforcing the importance of the end results. The medal is a long-term artifact symbolizing success. When Megan skated, her National's medal and various awards were displayed in the living room, while the rest of her medals were on hangers in her closet. "*I have a rack for gold and a rack for silver and a rack for bronze, [laughs] and there's so many of them. I don't know how many, in the hundreds for sure… I honestly just remember always being like a little the superstar in [my town]. They always [said], 'she's can go places - she's got so much talent'… I think that gave me a little confidence boost*" (Megan, I-2).

Some of the study participants reflected on how particular medals had significant meaning. Keri showed me a picture of her National medal, her "*prized possession*" (I-3). She reflected on how Nationals had felt like a regular competition without many people watching, but it got very serious when she won. As a top skater, she was then invited to skate in the Parade of Champions at the end of the weekend, "*[it] was in front of everybody at Canadians. So that was TERRIFYING*" (I-3). She remembers looking up and thinking, "*'OH MY GOD, I've never seen that many people and I have to skate in front of them'. It was scary, but it was cool and then you got to skate around in the big line and wave to everybody. It was a really cool experience*" (I-3). The competition was a turning point for Keri, as she explained, "*it all got very serious… I remember newspapers were calling me in the hotel, it was just a bit surreal. The [hometown] newspaper and [Provincial newspapers] called me, and there were all these faxes coming under the hotel door. It was really cool, but I was like, 'what the hell is going on? This is strange'*" (I-3). In this example, Keri learned the significance of a gold medal as her win brought a different level and new forms of attention including skating in the parade of champions and media interviews.

Megan explained that winning Nationals was also a high point for her. She remembered her skate at Nationals very clearly. "*I remember after the triple sow I heard [my coach] go, 'YES!' I heard him from the ice, and he was just screaming... I remember I was so excited when I finished. I knew I had won, I was positive. I was his first National champ… I just remember being really happy. And [at] the medal ceremony, I just remember [my coach] saying 'take it in, take it in, this could be the only time this happens'... That was really cool. That was probably one of the highlights of my skating career. And I was so young I [thought] 'what's happening'. I remember my first interview at that competition. It was super awkward. I didn't know what to say… they were in my face, and I was like 'I'm 13, leave me alone… I don't know what to say to you'*" (I-2). As Megan described, the competition was not only exciting for her, but also her coach. It went beyond her personal achievements, also impacting those who helped get her to that level. Like Keri, the added attention from the media overwhelmed Megan.

When Keri won her first National title her coaches framed her competition dress with a plaque identifying the event and date. "*[My coaches] had us over for a bbq one day, and that was their surprise. They had framed my dress… I remember thinking, 'is this okay, like, did they ask my mom? … this is weird - I can never get my dress out?'*" (I-3). Similarly, after Joe's first trip to Nationals, a family friend created a binder for him documenting the year. Inside the scrapbook there are newspaper clippings, stickers, and event protocols detailing the results of every competition he attended with a star showing where Joe was mentioned. As I reflected in my opening vignette (1.1), the reactions from others reinforce the importance and value of winning competitions. When extensive celebrations accompany winning, participants learn that this is the most valued outcome (above personal bests and enjoyment).

Megan and Keri both mention other people's reactions to their success, suggesting that they learned how exciting and significant winning was, in part, through the reactions of others. Medals (physical artifacts) and stories about winning (non-physical artifacts) gave insight into the values of the organizational culture of figure skating (Schein, 2010). Reactions to success came with embedded notions of the performance narrative (i.e., the importance of winning). Skaters learn what is expected of them, how to act, and how to differentiate themselves from others through the reactions parents, coaches, and Section members have in relation to skaters' performances.

The previous examples demonstrate how skaters received attention for their successes, however, participants also spoke of a culture where they *only* received attention if they were winning or skating well. Megan explained that she got a lot of attention when she won Nationals but very little after that, "*because I wasn't medaling Nationally I think. They honestly don't pay much attention to you if you're not high up Nationally. I found I would do really good and the [director] would be in my face [saying] 'you're awesome, how are you doing, what can I do to help'. And then when you were doing bad… I remember standing with him in an elevator, and… he didn't say one word to me, not one word - we went all the way up to eighth floor and he didn't say one word, just because I skated bad… my mom was always so mad [laughs] … thinking back now it is really weird - at the time I didn't think much of it. I just kind of expected it almost, that's just how you're kind of raised, you know? It's always been - 'You're skating good and there are people all around you and then you're not skating good and there's no one'"* (I-1).

Ryan also spoke of the fluctuating attention he would receive from the Section pointing out that [the Director] enjoyed having power and control over what went on, *"he doesn't have a lot of contact with you until you're at this level, and then he can give the yea or the nay"* (I-2).

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Ryan explained that [the Section] liked to associate themselves with good people, *"and good today, doesn't mean good tomorrow, but your good next Tuesday. Ok, we'll pick those days. Always very selective"* (I-2). He reflected on training a new program to a very dramatic and original piece of music. He explained that he had a vivid memory of [the director] watching him skate to it in practice, *"I remember him standing there like this [upright arms crossed] and then I remember it finishing, and I had this big dramatic pose at the end, and I remember him clapping really loud, and I went 'oh, I think it's going to be a good year' [with relief]. He had that much [power]. He was seen as a god, you know… let's just put it this way, that was half my lifetime ago, and I remember it very strongly - I remember what position he was standing in, I remember the ending pose. And I remember him clapping. And it was such a controversial program, because [of] the music… so to have that kind of approval changed my view - that ok, 'this is not going to be controversial anymore. This is going to be a success'"* (I-2).

The inconsistent attention came not only at a Section level, but also from coaches. Keri explained that the amount of attention she got from her coach varied depending on how she was skating. She did not have scheduled lesson times as she explained her coach *"would just kind of grab you whenever on a session, and take you. Especially if you are doing good at the time and if you weren't you didn't get any lessons… if you lost[22] jumps she wouldn't take you until you'd have them back"* (I-1). Keri explained that there would sometimes be large gaps in lessons when her coach was *"taking a break from her"* (I-1) because she was not happy with how Keri was skating. Megan also discussed lessons being tied to how skaters were doing a particular day. *"If you were skating bad or had a bad attitude you would always get last lesson; that was the way it*

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[22] 'Losing jumps' refers to a time when skaters stop landing jumps that they had previously landed successfully.

worked. If you were doing really good and [coach] was really excited, he would take you first and take you for a little bit longer" (I-1).

Similarly, when Ryan attended a competition with a coach other than his own, he found the coach only wanted to be associated with successful athletes. He described what happened after he had skated a disastrous short program, "*I got off the ice and I **couldn't find her**. She was there when I went on and I got off the ice and **I couldn't find her**... getting off of the ice and not seeing her, I could only equate it to, 'well, she must not have liked my skate'"* (I-1). The next time he saw her was back at the hotel that evening. *"[the next day] in the long program, I think I landed triple flip/triple toe, triple lutz/triple toe, my second triple lutz, it was a good skate... and she was like, giving me hugs and high fiving... it was a very different experience"* (Ryan, I-1).

Throughout my conversations with participants there was an obvious focus on competing and winning, and a constant push to reach a higher level of performance. Coaches and Section members reinforced these goals by focusing attention on skaters who were successful at a given time. In addition to medals, plaques, media attention, and attention from coaches, 'successful' skaters were also awarded funding to support their training expenses. However, Ryan explained *"you can spend a lot of time not making it"* (I-3). Yearly skating expenses were very high, so funding did not cover all expenses, but it helped. Further to this, Jared explained funding was tied to one's performance the season before, which was difficult when he was injured and unable to compete.

Rituals and ceremonies, medals and scrapbooks, stories and reactions from others, are all forms of artifacts; manifestations of a culture that values performance and winning (Schein, 2010). The performance narrative is embedded through artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. The basic assumption at the core of these artifacts is competition. Winning a competition in

figure skating, requires perfecting both the technical skills and the artistic side of the sport (Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003). The next section explores the embedded cultural values and assumptions within the artistic side of the sport.

6.5   Attributes and Artifacts of the Artistic Performance: Music, Choreography, Costumes and Personal Appearance

In this section, I critically examine aspects of the artistic side of figure skating culture, exploring stories of music, presentation, costumes, and the overall skating look. In the pursuit of winning, it is important to ensure that all aspects of the performance fit the image of the 'ideal figure skater'. That is, costuming, hair, music, and performance style are all part of becoming (and being) a 'successful' athlete via appearance. I begin with a personal reflection on the role of the coach and then discuss music and choreography, costumes, and hair style and dress codes.

6.5.1   Choosing skating programs as a coach.

As a coach, I worked closely with a choreographer at the beginning of each skating season to develop programs for each skater. We would spend hours listening to music to find the perfect arrangement. While some skaters would request a specific piece of music, I always made the final decision. I usually had specific ideas of music based on a specific area of their skating I wanted to develop (such as grace or speed), but I also considered what I thought would 'suit' the skater and would help the skater stand out at competitions.

Early in my coaching career, I met an energetic skater named Shawna. She made quite a first impression as she was wearing heavy jewelry, piercings, and black streaks in her blonde hair. As I got to know her I fell in love with her energy, her positive attitude, and her willingness to try anything. She was a powerful skater with strong jumps. For the upcoming season, I decided she would skate to a classical piece of music, to develop the softer side of her skating. At the time, I didn't question how developing 'grace' was reinforcing the hyper feminisation and stereotypical notions of gender in the sport.

I don't think Shawna liked the music, but she accepted it. The next step was to design the

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dress. Like music selection, Shawna had little say in her dress. The choreographer and I chose a dark purple body suit with poofy chiffon sleeves and a flowing chiffon dress. Shawna hated it from the time I had discussed the design with her. She did not want to wear something flowing and chiffony – it did not feel comfortable for her. It clashed with her personal style and was not reflective of her personality. Without realizing it, I was ensuring that she would fit into the traditional figure skating culture… She wore the dress – and she did very well that season. Others complimented her on the program, her skating, and her dress, reinforcing my decision. Rather than challenging the expectations of appearance, I perpetuated the idea that a successful skater has a very specific, classical look. As Adams (2011) explains, the traditional skating look and music selection is based on upper class European ideals. I selected a classical piece of music, with flowing graceful movements, to help Shawna fit into the culture rather than choosing a program that complimented her personality and skating style.

As I think back to Shawna, and my decision for her to wear the chiffony dress, I cringe a little. At the time, I did not question my choice. I had grown up in a sport where costumes, music, and choreography all influenced the overall result and coaches and choreographers made decisions for skaters based on their extensive experiences within the culture of the sport. Brackenridge (2004) explains how young athletes are taught not to question the coach as coaches are perceived to be the expert something Keri confirmed, "*I would always think they knew better than me*" (I-2). This sentiment was common among participants as I asked if they would have liked to have more input.

In the case above, Shawna won multiple competitions that season. As Douglas and Carless (2015) explain, overcoming discomfort in the pursuit of winning is celebrated within the performance narrative. Shawna's 'success' was likely a combination of her skating skills and performance (including her music and costume) as she overcame her discomfort with the costume and music. I had been proud when I reflected on Shawna's skating that season. It was not until I started hearing stories from participants about their experiences that I began to

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critically examine the decisions I made. As a coach, I did not ask the opinion of my skaters, or if I did, I still made the final decision. Hearing about the experiences of participants I interviewed gave me a different insight into the culture.

6.5.2   Music and choreography.

Ryan was very passionate in his descriptions of the sport and his love for skating. He enjoyed the artistic aspect of skating as much as, and in his early days even more than, the jumping and spinning. *"I felt that I was always accoladed [sic] for being able to interpret different pieces of music. I was quite naturally inclined to feel [the] music"* (Ryan, I-2). Ryan loved designing costumes and finding music for his programs. However, even with his creativity, passion, and artistry, his coach always made final decisions about music selection and costume design. When it was time to choose music Ryan told me, *"I brought some ideas forward to my coach, and… he's a pretty strong person, and I totally respect him for that, we didn't use those ideas, but we used something close"* (I-2).

The lack of control over one's music was common among participants. For Megan, when her coach asked if she liked a piece of music she did not hesitate. *"I would say yes, regardless… I pretty much liked all of them. The [coaches] pretty much know from the start what we like to skate to, or what you are good at skating to - I guess would be a better way to say it"* (I-1). As Megan explained, not only was the music chosen for the skaters, but it was chosen based on a very specific idea of what type of skater the coaches thought they were. Each of the skaters at her club had a character, *"I was strong and really intense, and Clare was always fun and always smiling in her programs, whereas Brianne was always super graceful, the pretty one… so we all kind of knew we had our personalities and that's what we did"* (I-1). As I listened to Megan, I wondered if she was happy about her character, or if she felt constrained in her opportunity to

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skate to different music. She told me, *"I never had a graceful program, because I was never really graceful; I always had intense dark programs, like hard beats or stuff like that"* (I-1). As we discussed her programs further it became clear that skating to intense music was not necessarily her first choice. *"Honestly there was always a part of me that really wished that I was good at performing and being graceful. I think I did like it, I just wasn't good at it. I was never known as graceful… [people would say] 'she's really, really good jumping' but I never got, 'Oh my God your program's amazing'. I never got that"* (I-2).

Stories like Megan's are common, as coaches often find music to 'suit' the skater. Unfortunately, decisions are often based on a skater's body type, skin colour, and skating style. These choices do not help the athlete develop other aspects of their skating, and do not allow them to explore their own creativity. Reflecting on my coaching, I realize that I typically chose roles for skaters in skating carnivals based on body type. For example, because we did not have any male skaters in the club, it was common to have taller or stronger looking female skaters play a male role. One season a mother complained that her daughter was always given the 'boy' role in club carnivals. In pairs and ice dance, the male partner is typically taller than the female partner allowing for the female to be easily lifted and/or thrown. As Van Veen (2012) explained, this convention relates to an ideology that males are stronger while females are more flexible. In skating carnivals, partner skating often mimics moves completed in pairs and dance events, so, without much consideration, I always cast stronger and taller girls in male roles. It had not occurred to me that this skater may not want to play the male role or, more importantly, that I was reinforcing stereotypes about male and female bodies.

Coaches and choreographers also tend to reinforce racial stereotypes. Discussing this phenomenon with a friend, she commented, "If I see one more Asian girl skating to Mulan…"

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As a skating judge, she regularly saw non-white skaters skate to 'ethnic music' to enhance their 'exotic look'. In 2010, Russian ice dancers Oksana Domnina and Maxim Shabalin chose an 'Australian Aboriginal Dance' for their original dance. The routine received a lot of attention with some identifying it as 'cultural theft' as the dance was appropriated without permission or consultation. As Grau (2010) explained, their costuming was theatrical; "They took to the ice with their faces painted with designs reminiscent more of the makeup of the Broadway show *The Lion King* than of Aboriginal designs, and wearing red loincloths over brown body suits" (p. 51). Their choreography included problematic primate-like movements. As Bev Manton, an Australian Aboriginal leader, reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

> From an Aboriginal perspective, this performance is offensive. It was clearly not meant to mock Aboriginal culture, but that does not make it acceptable to Aboriginal people. There are a number of problems with the performance, not least of all the fact both skaters are wearing brown body suits to make their skin appear darker. That alone puts them on a very slippery slope. (Manton, 2010, as cited in Grau, 2010, p. 51)

In contrast, when Australian ice dancers Danielle O'Brien and Greg Merriman skated to a Aboriginal dance in 2008 and 2010, they worked directly with Aboriginal people to develop costuming and choreography that ensured authenticity and respect (Grau, 2010).

At a local level, many choreographic decisions are made based on a skater's skin colour and or body type, as was the case for Alexa. It was her choreographer who came up with the idea for her favourite program, *"an Indian, kind of exotic program [with] very exotic music, very different, [and] super abstract"* (I-1). *"[Her choreographer] said, 'oh I really think you would look good with like an exotic type of look'. I loved the music that he picked. It was really good"* (I-2). Alexa explained that after her choreographer designed the program he would come back

every month or so to monitor how it was going. *"If the choreography [was] not looking the way he wanted it to, we'd have to fix it and make changes"* (I-3). For Alexa and her choreographer, creating the overall performance was a neatly woven combination of music, costumes, make-up, and choreography.

Coaches and announcers often refer to the 'complete package' of skaters when discussing their potential. This refers to a combination of athletic technique and artistry. As Kestnbaum (1995) writes:

> Skaters (and their coaches) know that, like it or not, skaters are judged on their image, and part of putting together a competitive program means packaging their image with professional choreography, music recording, and costuming in the interest of constructing a performance that will generate approval from judges and fans'. (p. 55-56)

After coaches and choreographers choose the music, they work with the athletes to prepare them for competitions, but not all skaters like the artistic component. For example, Keri explained, *"[I would think] I don't want to be an actor or ballet dancer or whatever you're trying to get me to be, I want to skate and do these skills"* (I-1). Upon reflection, she realized the Section and her coach were trying to develop her into an well-rounded skater, *"now I look back and realize what was going on, whereas at the time I thought, 'just leave me be, and I will skate on my own'. I didn't really understand the broader picture of what goes on in the Section office, what they are looking for, what they are trying to make*" (I-2).

Within the sport, individual creativity is stifled as coaches, choreographers, Section members, and judges (i.e., the 'experts') make specific choreographing decisions within the rules of the sport. Even for participants who enjoyed the artistry, completing specific choreography was challenging as Ryan explained, *"I was totally free-flowing and just able to feel [the music],*

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but could not pick up choreography to save my life, the sequencing and remembering, because I'd be totally thinking about how much I loved this section, and in the middle [I would forget what I was doing]" (I-2). In his situation, he had to alter his style and movements to work within a vision created by the coach or choreographer.

Coaches and choreographers, in turn, are guided by the International Skating Union rules and regulations. While many participants discussed freedom and creativity within the sport, this creativity must happen within a narrow view of 'appropriate' movements. For example, until recently, in the short program men were required to perform a step sequence which emphasizes speed, agility, and power. In contrast, women were required to perform a spiral sequence which demonstrates flexibility and grace, further reinforcing gender stereotypes (McGarry, 2003).

6.5.3 Costumes.

Costumes, which can cost upwards of $400 to 500 dollars[23], are an important part of the image figure skaters present. They are often created to match a specific piece of music or mood that the coaches and choreographer have envisioned. Some skaters, like Megan, are attracted to the sport because of the "*pretty dresses*" (I-1). The significance of costumes is highlighted not only by the costs, but the time and effort put into creating them.

The International Skating Union outlines specific regulations for costume design. While rules have changed over the years, the current rule states, "clothing must be modest, dignified and appropriate for athletic competitions" (ISU, 2016, p. 74). Modesty often refers to the amount of the body the athlete is revealing. However, as Rand (2012) explains, costumes in figure skating are tight-fitting with minimal coverage in some places. Many female skaters use

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[23] Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) also cited high costs estimating $500-600 per dress.

'illusion fabric' (that blends with the skaters' skin colour) to create coverage and keep the dress from shifting or falling off (Rand, 2012). Regulations around costuming reinforce masculine and feminine expectations of appearance. As skaters are socialized into the sport they begin to wear costumes that make them look older and more mature. However, participants may also be reprimanded when they choose a costume that overconforms to perceptions of what a costume should look like (e.g., length of skirt, amount of decorations, use of illusion fabric). Keri recalled how a judge once commented on the coverage of her dress, *"It was quite risqué now that I look at it, like it was just spaghetti strap [v-neck] and then a black skirt and black mesh in [the midriff], you could see my belly button which was pretty weird at the time. I loved the dress but, I remember a judge saying 'that's a bit too much, get some more material on there'"* (I-2).

The idea of 'covering up' might be less about being physically covered, and more about the gendered expectations of the sport. As Kestnbaum (2003) explains skating skirts do not increase modesty as they regularly fly up during a performance, therefore the skirt is merely a symbol of formality and femininity. While the excessive use of 'illusion material' is sometimes questioned the general design of the dress is not, as Rand (2012) explains:

> Panty flashing is so embedded in figure skating, a sport widely associated with old-fashioned, balletic gender presentation, that virtually all skirted costumes – that is, most costumes for girls and women – include a matching panty sewn in to accommodate routine exposures that might read in other contexts as "I see London, I see France" embarrassing accidents. (Rand, 2012, p. 106)

At the 1988 Olympics, when African American skater Debi Thomas chose to cover the majority of her body by wearing a unitard she was criticized for her choice. White skates, first introduced by Sonja Henie in the 1930s, accentuate the line of the leg (if the skater is white)

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(Kestnbaum, 2003; Rand, 2008). The reverse happens when black skaters wear white skates. It is generally felt that a black skate next to white (or beige) legs would cut the line of the leg making a skater look stocky. However, the gendered expectations suggest that the only two choices for women's skate colour are white and beige (beige is often used in show skating) while male skaters wear black. Therefore, skaters like Debi Thomas were forced to either challenge the gendered expectations by having a shorter leg line, or, as Debi Thomas did, wear leggings that extended over the skate. The year after Thomas competed with a unitard, the ISU instituted a 'no unitard' rule for female competitors[24].

Growing up with the expectation of wearing a dress, Alexa felt uncomfortable when she was asked to wear a unitard at her club carnival. "*I thought it looked silly… I liked my classic dress. And I was kind of embarrassed because, [pause], I had a really big skating bum and … it's a tight spandex outfit, [that was] BRIGHT red, but, I got a lot of compliments on it. I just don't think it's flattering, it's okay, I'd just rather see a dress*" (I-2).

Similarly, Keri did not like the look of unitards even though the skirt does not cover more of your body. "*I feel like you have to have a skirt for some reason. But really, why? It's just 'cause that's normal. A unitard is almost better because it's all over whereas [with a dress] you can see, … you have that little underwear bit, which is kind of weird. When the skirt flies up, that is essentially like looking like underwear...*" (I-2).

In both positive and negative ways, costumes often bring attention to skaters. For Alexa, having a nice dress symbolized being an elite skater, and she described her favourite dress with

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[24] In recent years, the ruling on unitards has been reversed and a few skaters have once again opted to wear a unitard instead of a skating dress.

enthusiasm. "*I had a dress - it was literally covered in gold sequins… [with] a bare midriff. It was very mature, probably my favourite dress, and people still say 'oh your [colour] dress!', you know? It was like **that** dress*" (I-1). Alexa explained that at the Junior level "*your dress is a **big deal**" (I-1). Alexa's discussion of the importance of her dress demonstrates the way that members of the organization create and re-create cultural values and expectations (Smircich, 1983). Alexa learned from others in the organization that it was important to have a nice dress, she then likely passed this idea on to others. Cultural expectations of appropriate costuming are embedded in the organizational culture as they are collectively understood as appropriate at a given time (Pettigrew, 1979). While expectations can change over time as styles and rules change (such as the above example of unitards in competition), many similarities can be seen historically in terms of masculinity and femininity.

Similar to their choreography, few skaters had input into costume design. Megan described herself as artistic, but had little input, "*I was really artistic my whole life so [my coach] would get me to kind of draw stuff up. And she never really used it but she like took it to get inspiration from it [laughs]. [My coach] always drew the program designs. We would have them done by a [seamstress]. They were always really, really elaborate and expensive*" (I-1).

Jared explained that when he was younger he accepted what his coaches suggested, but had more input as he moved up to Junior and Senior. "*I loved being involved. It made me feel like I was growing and coming into myself as a skater, and an individual. You… get to that point where you have to take control you can't just keep relying on other people to do things for you. And I've always been kind of an artistic person, so having the opportunity to be more involved in my choreography or costume stuff was really fun for me*" (I-1). This counter story demonstrates an increasing involvement some participants may experiences as they learn the cultural norms

and expectations within the sport. Jared explained that he and his coach did not always agree on his choices leading to further discussions and compromises. However, his overall opportunity for input and perceived choice was notably higher than other participants.

While some skaters were very happy with the costumes and music their coaches chose, others were not. For example, Keri's coach wanted to create a new look for her when she was invited to an international competition, *"[My coach] had my mom make a red… sleeveless dress, with a layer of lime green underneath and 'Canada' down [the side]… It was so tacky, I [thought] 'oh God that's hideous', but [my coach] loved it… And she made me cut my hair, which [I thought] 'oh my God I'm going to die', but I needed a new look, [so] I did it anyway… it was fine, just a bit embarrassing… in my short hair and stupid Canada dress – [laughs] - but I'm sure people noticed, and that was her goal*" (Keri, I-2). The importance of getting noticed, standing out, and looking like a figure skater are embedded in the culture, something that I was a part of reinforcing as a coach although I only realized this recently[25].

6.5.4 Appearance - Hair style and dress codes.

While the focus of costume design is usually geared toward competitions, participants also discussed the importance of wearing appropriate clothing at practices in their home club. Grenfell and Reinhart (2003) note that skaters are constantly "on stage" and scrutinized for appearance and attitude even during practices (p. 83). As Alexa explained, once she moved up into Junior Academy there was a dress code "*so you wear your tights and your skirts… no helmets*" (I-1). She went on to explain that, as Ryan had learned, jeans were not acceptable, "*I*

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[25] See Appendix C for my reflection on hair styles.

have a feeling I may have worn jeans once or twice, and got yelled at in Junior Academy

[laughs] … those were the rules" (Alexa, I-1).

Given this level of attention to dress codes even at practice, it is not surprising that some skaters spend a considerable amount of time preparing practice outfits. For example, Megan explained that her mother made her dresses and then she would spend hours designing and decorating them with rhinestones. Ryan liked the artistry of the sport, and his talent expressed itself in his costume designs. *"I went so far as to having my seamstresses give me design sheets, so that I could… do drawings, I have one that looked like a corkscrew when I was spinning, because I wanted to have that look of something being faster than it actually was"* (I-2).

Specific expectations around practice clothing vary between clubs. In some clubs, it is common for female skaters to wear exercise pants instead of a dress to train in, but there are still specific expectations of the overall look. For example, Megan explained at her club she wore yoga pants and a tank top, "*I think now … they have to be a little bit more professional*" (I-1). Megan told me what 'professional' in skating meant to her, "*I think the best way to describe it would be girly, like, very clean lines and like a low back [bodysuit] or something. Nothing baggy, nothing with words, plain colours, [something with] rhinestones*" (I-1).

New ideas about appropriate practice clothing may be introduced to the club culture as individuals train in other clubs and return with new ideas about what 'professional' skating attire is. In Krista's club, everyone always wore a skating dress to practice. *"It wasn't until I started going to [the larger city] when they were wearing pants that I started to*" (Krista, I-1). Krista experienced the broader culture of competitive figure skating as she trained in a larger center. When she returned to her local club, she introduced yoga pants (a new artifact) to other skaters in her club and in doing so passed on what she had learned about being an elite athlete. As Smirich

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(1983) explained, culture is influenced and re-created by participants. While examples of change, particularly in relation to appearance, were minimal, this example demonstrates the potential to shift the norms of a training environment. Still concerning, however, is the continued emphasis on clothing and appearance and the way in which athletes and their bodies are continuously on display. While it is often thought that practices are a place where athletes can make mistakes, these examples align with Grenfell and Rinehart's (2003) findings that in the skating arena skaters are always being watched.

6.6   Summary

Competitions are highly valued in figure skating (and in all high-performance sport) and are often seen as the ultimate assessment of a person's skill. In figure skating, competition success is often tied to attributes of performance such as costumes, music, and choreography. The purpose of this chapter was to explore research question number two: How are tensions related to participants' experiences of the organizational culture of figure skating? As I explored the artifacts, values, and basic assumptions of the sport, the pervasiveness of the performance narrative and the ways it was embedded in the organizational culture became visible. In addition, I began to see some of the tensions that participants experienced in relation to the culture and performance narrative. As Clandinin, Murphy, Huber and Orr (2009) explain, tensions can be a place of learning. Rather than smoothing over and disregarding tensions, we can further examine them to provide a more complex understanding of participant experiences. In this chapter, tensions related to the expectation to go to the Olympics, the value placed on competitions and winning, and the focus of performance including costumes, music, choreography were illuminated.

Critically exploring the organizational culture of figure skating we can see how ideas of performance and winning have become naturalized in the sport (Alvesson, 2013). Denaturalization happens through directing attention to artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. Critically examining rules and regulations related to appropriate costuming for men and women uncovers the gendered expectations and creation of hyperfeminine and masculine ideals. Seemingly innocuous comments related to competitive success, the Olympics, and other goals must be unpacked further to explore the ways they re-create problematic (and narrow) expectations about goals of skaters.

The performance narrative is often discussed as 'stories of success' and 'stories' more generally, however, throughout this chapter I have outlined some of the ways the performance narrative goes beyond stories and is embedded in artifacts, values, and basic assumptions of skating culture. The performance narrative surrounds high-performance athletes from the time they start skating, naturalizing ideas about competition and winning. Participants learn at a young age that competition results are important. For many people, these results are the most important measure of success and progress, however, they are not always a direct reflection of ability, skill, or dedication to a sport. On any given day, a person may skate poorly and win, or skate well and not place. When attention is given disproportionately to end results at a competition, athletes may lose sight of personal accomplishments. While coaches and parents may attempt to maintain a balanced perspective on competition and understand that not all skaters will pursue a career in figure skating (or be 'successful'), concepts such as 'personal improvements' and 'individual accomplishments' tend to be marginalized in the narrative of performance that is tightly woven into the culture of the sport.

The emphasis on competitions (e.g., decorating the arena, shifting family holidays to attend competitions, and holding extravagant medal ceremonies) and on winning (e.g., holding parties, media interviews, and framing medals and dresses) teaches participants that competitive results are the key measure of their success. The focus on music, choreography, and costumes teaches participants that appearance and overall performance are critical components of the performance narrative in figure skating. Not only is it important to be able to perform complex skills, but skaters have to do it *"with a smile on your face"* (Megan, I-2).

What is particularly interesting throughout this exploration of culture is how readily participants accepted expectations and did not try to change or challenge them. Even though some participants were unhappy with music or costuming decisions made by their coaches, these decisions were accepted. There were a few occasions where participants appeared to alter culture (such as Krista introducing new practice clothing to her club) demonstrating the possibility of cultural shift. However, changes took place within a broad and powerful culture which was left predominantly unaltered. As Megan explained, while yoga pants were an accepted part of training clothing, female figure skaters in her club were still expected to dress within feminine ideals with fitted bodysuits and rhinestones. There are few examples to show radical shifts in the culture.

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the performance narrative is imbedded within the organizational culture of figure skating through competitions, medals/awards, and an overall focus on appearance and performance. Douglas and Carless (2015) suggest that the performance narrative, where athletes' primary focus is on outcomes, may be detrimental to the individual. Without shifting the overall culture, it would be difficult for alternative narratives to emerge.

Chapter 7: **Reflecting on a Life of a Skater**

This chapter reports the study findings relating to research question three: How do participants reflect on tensions over time? I also examine related questions of how their perceptions have changed since retirement, when participants became aware of tensions they experienced, and what new tensions have emerged since retirement as well as examining participant's overall reflections on their experiences. The chapter builds on the discussions presented in Chapters 5 and 6 by exploring how the participants identified and talked about tensions, focusing particularly on self-reflective narratives that arose when questioning specific feelings and actions they experienced as athletes. While each participant's comments were technically based on their 'reflections' on past experiences, this chapter focuses on those moments where participants appear to give additional consideration to their experiences. For example, when Krista discussed arguing with her mother she added further reflection, *"I probably shouldn't have yelled at my mom so much"*.

As noted previously, the participants had varying levels of involvement with figure skating at the time of our conversations. Some had distanced themselves from the sport, and now only skated casually from time to time. For others, skating remained an important part of their lives as they were now coaching either part or full time. Regardless of their current involvement in the sport, however, most of the participants said they had not thought about, or talked about the details of their skating experiences since their retirement.

In this chapter, I present reflections as a fictional conversation between participants. The participants were never actually in each other's presence; they did not know each other and were unaware of who was participating in the project. The juxtaposition of stories seen throughout the dialogue can help to demonstrate the similarities of some participant experiences and diversity of

others. The dialogue maintains the detail of individual narratives while inviting inter-narrative comparisons. As Frank (2010) explains, "*Two* stories are the beginning of *thinking*, as opposed to being caught up in one story. *Two* stories instigate dialogue… *Two* stories are necessary for thinking because each opens up a critical distance from the evocative intensity of the other" (p. 152). By using the participants' own accounts in a fictional context, I am able to explore the impacts of social and cultural influences on their lives and demonstrate convergences and divergences of individual experiences as well as the connections between participants' individual lives and the broader skating culture. The dialogue can serve as a means to think with participants' stories in more depth as it allows us to see not only multiple stories in contrast with each other, but also how individual participant stories shift and change in relation to their evolving biographies and points of view.

The dialogue I have created is meant to simulate a discussion that *could* have happened. Many statements are verbatim while others have been altered slightly to work within the overall dialogue (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012). By presenting the data in dialogue form, I wanted to avoid dissecting individual stories and burying them in analysis. The dialogue offers insight into the complexity of each participant and the context of figure skating by bringing their separate statements into a group framework, even though the context is fictionalized. Throughout the creation of the dialogue, I was attentive to my ethical responsibility to remain true to the participants' stories as they presented them to me during interviews. As I created the dialogue, I began by considering each participant's overall narrative in relation to each general theme (e.g., transitioning out of skating), before identifying specific quotations I would use within the dialogue. This helped me remain attentive to the broader lives of participants as I continuously reflected on my choice of words. In many respects, the final dialogue mimicked the discussions

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I had with individual participants. Instead of including my response and further discussions in relation to a participant's comments, I juxtaposed another participant's response related to the same topic.

The chapter is organized in six sections focusing on five areas that participants reflected upon: training, competition, and well-being; transitioning out of figure skating; success; willingness to repeat the experience; the culture and social system of figure skating; and a final section that provides an overview that considers the value of 'thinking with stories' (Clandinin, 2013; Richardson, 2000).

7.1   Reflecting on Training, Competitions, and Well-being

Megan and Krista are filled with anticipation as they walk into the cool arena. It had been years since they had seen anyone from the skating world. After months of trying to get together with some old skating friends they had finally found a time to meet, and where else but in an arena during a skating competition!

Alexa was the first person they saw as they entered the arena. She and Jared were chatting while watching the Senior women's practice session. As they approached, Megan overheard Alexa say, "For almost two years after I quit I couldn't watch skating. I would just get too emotional watching it because I felt like, 'Why aren't I out there? This was me, my whole life, and now I'm here in the audience'. It was weird for me to get over it…"

Megan stepped in beside them, "It's so strange isn't it? It's everything and then it's gone." As Alexa turned toward her a big smile crossed her face, "Megan! How are you?" Alexa hugged Megan and then turned to Krista, "I can't believe how long it's been! It's so good to see you two."

"Has anyone seen Ryan or Joe yet?" Krista asked.

"Here I am," Joe said. "I just saw Ryan and told him we would meet him upstairs."

"Great! I'd like to watch the Juvenile men's event that starts at four," said Jared. As they walked upstairs they began chatting about what everyone was doing now. The conversation soon shifted back to skating as they sat down and looked back towards the ice.

"I used to love competition practices," Jared mumbled aloud. "I was always so pumped with adrenaline. Especially if there were lots of people watching. I loved performing for them without the pressure of the actual competition."

As Jared spoke, a father and daughter walked by. "How was your practice?" they overheard the father ask. "It was fine," the young girl snapped back at him with a scowl on her face, looking inconvenienced by his question.

Krista watched their interaction. "I remember that feeling. My dad used to say I would get into 'competition mode' where nobody could talk to me," she said with an awkward chuckle. "My mom probably got the worst of it though. She would try and tell me what I was doing wrong, but I would just get more frustrated with the fact that I wasn't landing my jump, or doing a spin properly. I would get mad when she tried to help me because I was so frustrated with myself." Krista paused as she watched the little girl who was now yelling something at her parents. She continued, "I would get kind of mean to my mom a lot, because I was just really stressed out, so I took out all of my anger on my mom and my sister." She laughed a little, "I probably shouldn't have yelled at my mom so much."

"I used to bicker with my mom all the time," Megan said. "A lot of the fights were about skating because my whole day would revolve around skating and then I would come home and she wanted to know how skating went. It would be like my day from 6 o'clock in the morning until 7 o'clock at night would be like skating, skating, skating, and like 100% based on it."

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Alexa agreed, "I know how you feel. My mom used to watch my practices whenever she could. I don't think I would have been as successful if I had someone who would just drop me off at the rink every day, you know?" Alexa paused, "But sometimes I wished that she would, because after she watched me practice we would come home and it would be like an hour lecture. Sometimes there would be too much debriefing. When I came home I just wanted to do my own thing." Megan nodded in agreement.

"I had a skating dad," Jared joined in. "He was really tough on me. I think especially once I started winning medals, that's when the push got real. He never admitted that he was proud of me or let me enjoy each milestone; he always wanted me to think about the next step. He never wanted me to think that I was good enough, so he would never say that to me, he would always find a flaw. So, I would be in the mindset that there was always something to work on. At the time, it was really tough for me, because I just wanted him to be proud of what I'd accomplished, but I'm actually thankful for it now. I think it was just the right amount of push that I needed. It really helped me, and instilled in me the basic qualities of just being disciplined, training smart, and making the most of each session."

They looked back out at the ice. The women were doing a final lap and curtsy before leaving the ice. The Juvenile men were preparing for their event.

"I used to get so nervous for competitions," Megan said sipping her water. "As soon as I stepped on the ice I was fine, but the day of, I couldn't barely eat. I felt like I was going to throw up, I would get so nervous. It started to get to the point where I couldn't feel my legs before a competition so I would just hammer on them. After the competition, I would have bruises all over them. Hand prints from slapping my legs before I went on the ice," she said demonstrating the pounding.

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"I was the same," Keri said. "I didn't like competing. I liked being done competing, and I liked when I did well, but I didn't like the actual competition. I remember every competition I would get so nervous I would have this horrible pain in my stomach. Like it was just in knots and about an hour after every competition, when I was done, I would be keeled over," she said leaning over clutching her stomach. "It was so painful as it was unknotting. I couldn't even stand up, I would have to sit like this for hours until it was gone. I never went to the doctor. I don't know if it was something serious" Keri laughed. "Clearly I didn't enjoy it that much. It was horrible - it was very stressful."

Krista looked around, "Did anyone really like competing?"

Joe looked up from the menu he had been mulling over, "You know, I used to love that feeling. I used to thrive off the excitement and pressure of competitions. But the very last competition I did, after I had taken a year off, I was standing at the boards before going on for the short program, and I remember thinking 'I don't like this feeling anymore', like the nervous adrenaline. I was like 'I don't like this. So, I'm going to do this and then I'm not going to do it again.'"

"I couldn't imagine competing again now, I am so far away from that world," Krista said.

"Yeah, I think the time away from skating really shifted my mindset," Joe reflected. "I was changing as a person. Standing at the boards before my skate used to be the best feeling, I felt energized and aggressive," he paused, "I felt like I could do anything. But then at age 22, I didn't like it... I really didn't like the person that I turned into in training as the competition came closer; I started to recognize I was not really a good version of myself."

"We were all like that, we all got really intense and a little bit crazy," Keri said. "I remember even during some of our practice sessions people would get pissed off and kick the ice and hit the boards."

"I remember watching a skater pick someone else up by the scruff of the neck and threaten him, like, 'if you ever get in my way again…,'" Ryan added.

Krista interrupted, "Yeah, I will never forget skating with one person. He seemed to think that everybody needed to just stand at the boards when he was skating. And he would throw a fit if he popped a jump … because you would apparently be in his way, even if you were nowhere near where he was jumping."

"There was so much drama, spitting on the ice, spitting in people's faces, kicking things. Honestly, I think everybody was crazy. I wouldn't do any of that, but I would give up on myself and pop jumps. But it was allowed, you knew that nothing would happen if you did. Nobody thought the poor behaviour was strange because everyone was like that. We were just all so crazy. I was just a mental case… it's so different to look back at it now. If I had thought then like I think now I would've been so good, but I was just a different person," Keri explained.

"Yeah," Joe said, "I definitely changed when I was away from skating. I think because I'd lived as a normal person for a bit. And then it's just purely feeling the calm, and the order, and the efficiency that you work at in daily life, whether it's good or bad or high pressure or stress. The way that I felt that I conducted myself normally, was not what I was feeling when I was training. When I was training, I felt really angry. I felt very concerned about what everybody else thought, really negative, and I would lash out at other people," he paused as he reflected, "Just not a good version of myself. And I think, not that I didn't know that in the years prior, but it was easily dismissed because, like Keri said, everybody acts like that. The top

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person in our training environment was like that. It was all just very excusable, so that's how we trained. So then, having the year away from the sport, and then coming back and watching myself sort of turning back into that, I was like 'I don't like this, I should probably stop.'"

"Honestly, I think it's the perfect breeding ground for craziness to happen. I think it's just the stress that makes everyone go a little bit nuts," Keri added. She hesitated before continuing, "But I do think it can be managed in a way that people don't get out of hand, and they stay realistic about it... maybe we were just a bunch of weirdos, I don't know."

"It's a really stressful environment though. Everyone is really competitive and just trying to get ahead," Krista said.

Alexa jumped in, "And it's really hard because everyone is so young. I had really bad anxiety and stress. It's so much to put on a 13 or 14 year old kid, right? I was in a crazy mental state. I blamed myself for everything, for my parents throwing their money down the drain, for my coach's stress from dealing with me in frustration, and my own frustration with myself. I thought I was psychotic. I'd convinced myself I was psychotic. I would go to school and think about it all day. I would go and cry in the bathroom about it. It consumed me to the point where it was just stupid. What kid that age should have that kind of pressure on themselves? It was messed up."

Keri was nodding sympathetically, "I started going a bit crazy at the end I think - as you do - because it's all you do, and it's just so stressful."

Megan was also nodding, "I dealt with a bit of anxiety too. Like there were some days for sure where I would've been way better off not even going to the rink. I'd wake up in the morning, and think, 'today is not going to be good,' and that day was not going to be good. There was no way that I was going to turn that day around, I had that in my head the whole time.

Those days were so bad, it was horrible, I never want to go back. If I was to do it again, I would definitely listen more to my feelings, instead of listening to everybody else and doing whatever everybody else told me. Doing what I felt was right for me and feeling like I had more control probably would've made a big difference in the mental aspect of it."

"But we didn't do any mental training. We didn't learn how to deal with our anxiety or nerves, or whatever was going on. There weren't any check-ins or any development or growth happening on the psychological forefront. There was nothing until my performance slipped. And then once it slipped..." Ryan looked around as if he was just now realizing this, "I think this is kind of the crux of the matter, when my performance slipped I had to go to psychology, which made me doubt and second guess myself more. I started to think and feel like there must be a problem and it became more of a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Megan laughed a little, "at least they considered it might be psychological. When my performance slipped, my coaches told me I had to lose weight."

"It's so strange though, don't you think?" Ryan paused as he collected his thoughts, "Mental fitness has to be cultivated and to grow with the human being, from entry to exit. And it should be a healthy, nurturing experience that is trained from the beginning, and not something that is introduced when there is a problem and we are in crisis mode. We train other parts of the body throughout, why not the brain?"

7.1.1   Unpacking reflections on training and competition

In this portion of the dialogue I explored how the participants reflected on training, competitions, and well-being. Participants often reflected on how intense and all-consuming their time in the sport was, and how abruptly it seemed to be over. Participants described their skating experiences as a full immersion into figure skating. As discussed in Chapter 5,

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participants adopted the norms, values, and basic assumptions of the sport culture. Comments such as *"this was me, my whole life"* and *"it's everything and then it's gone"* suggest that there was little balance between life as a skater and life outside of the sport; it appeared that commitments to the sport consumed them. Because of the participants' complete immersion in the sport, at the time, tensions were often overlooked or accepted as necessary, taken-for-granted aspects of being an elite athlete.

Participants seemed to become more aware of their tensions after they had stepped away from the sport. Joe noted how, after returning from a year away from the training culture, what once was a great feeling, standing at the boards preparing to compete now felt uncomfortable to him. He also reflected on the tensions, anger, and anxiety he felt while training. As we learn through the dialogue, many of the participants reflected on how what seemed normal and acceptable at the time stands out as inappropriate now. While immersed in the culture, poor behaviours in training and at competitions were normalized by those involved in the sport (Alvesson, 2002). Actions such as yelling at parents and acting poorly on the ice were *"excusable"* and *"easily dismissed"* because the social conditions supported their behaviour. The participants discussed getting into *"competition mode"* focusing primarily on themselves and taking out stress on those around them. Their behaviours were normalized within the culture of skating and the performance narrative and therefore not analyzed in a critical way. After being away from the sport, however, they were more critical of their actions as they were better able to compare their circumstances to 'normal' life, that is, a life outside of figure skating.

This portion of the dialogue highlights some of the changing perceptions that came after retirement as participants reflected on actions and scenarios that they would now consider inappropriate. However, participants also seemed to justify tensions as necessary parts of being

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an elite athlete, acknowledging how something such as parental pressure was challenging, but then explaining how it made them better. As Jared explained, his dad would never tell him he was proud of him, always finding the flaws in his performance. However, he believed the pressure his dad had put on him as an athlete, "*instilled in [him] the basic qualities of just being disciplined*". Similarly, Alexa felt her success was related to her mother's high level of involvement in her training. Participants believed the constant push that contributed to their stress and anxiety, was a necessary part of getting to the highest level. While elite athletes must be disciplined in their training, there are a variety of ways of encouraging a strong work ethic and positive training environment. While parental pressure might seem appropriate to some, it may be counterproductive to the overall development and self-confidence of the individual.

As discussed in Chapter 5, competitions were understood as an important part of being an athlete. However, when asked about competing, the participants all described competitions as a *necessary* rather than *enjoyable* part of their participation. Collectively, they noted high levels of nervousness and anxiety surrounding competing which in some cases resulted in extreme physiological reactions to nerves, such as Megan not feeling her legs and Keri's stomach being so knotted after the competition that she could not stand up straight. The perceived importance of competing and winning that is embedded in the culture and performance narrative of figure skating heightened Megan and Keri's nerves. At the time, these conditions were not questioned; they were another normalized part of being an athlete. When they did well at competitions, the discomfort was forgotten as they (and those around them) believed the result made any discomfort worthwhile. Winning fulfilled the performance narrative and justified any anxiety they felt prior to the competition (Douglas & Carless, 2015). If they did not win, skaters returned to train harder and ensure success at the next competition. The tension between the

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need to be evaluated through competitions and the stress and anxiety that came with competing

may not have been explicitly questioned before retirement because there was no other option but

to compete. Rather than questioning whether the value placed on the outcome of competitions is

excessive and unnecessary, participants are expected to manage their nerves within the system.

The participants frequently discussed their experiences in relation to those around them.

Joe discussed being *"very concerned about what everybody else thought"*; that is, his

experiences were influenced by others' perceptions of him. Alexa referred to her parents, who

were spending a lot of money on her, and her coach, who was probably very stressed working

with her. Their comments reflect the sociality of their experiences which are situated within a

broader social context and may or may not be positive and supportive (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000).

Multiple participants discussed issues of mental health. While the skaters I interviewed

trained their bodies (often to excess), they had very little training or support for mental health

and well-being[26]. Rather than learning how to manage stress and anxiety, participants explained

that they were expected to learn about mental health on their own and were only provided

support as a way to fix the problem once it became unmanageable from the perspective of

coaches and parents. Unfortunately, this model often led participants to feel as though their

experiences of stress and anxiety were unique personal problems. Alexa told me that she thought

she was *'psychotic'* noting there was *'a lot of pressure'*, but focused on the pressure that she put

on herself. While the participants sometimes discussed the broader culture that may influenced

[26] Because I did not interview administrators and coaches, and because the system and programming has changed
over the years, it is unclear if there was any programming to help athletes transitioning out of the sport (e.g., if it was
available to some but not all athletes.

them, they tended to focus on personal issues. For example, Keri commented *'maybe we were just a bunch of weirdos'* (i.e., we were the problem). However, as we look at these stories beside one another, and listen to the ways participants 'discuss' them with each other, we can see many potential connections between the cultural expectations in the sport and participants stress and anxiety. This highlights the importance of exploring individual experiences in relation to a broader, collective context. Individual stories were not isolated or unique. Rather, there were commonalities among the participants which suggests there may me more systemic, culture issues within the sport.

7.2   Transitioning out of Figure Skating

Some of the skaters were coming up to the lounge after their practice. Keri saw one of her past competitors in the distance. "Wow, Julie is still skating? I thought she was quitting. I didn't expect to see her here," she commented.

"It's not easy to make the decision to quit. Maybe she is just waiting until she knows it's the right time," Megan said.

"I knew going into my last competition," Krista said abruptly. "If I didn't make Canadians I was going to school. I had already been accepted, just in case I didn't make it. It wasn't really a big deal. I decided I was going to try one more time and then it was time to move on to something new and start a new chapter in my life. It didn't bother me to quit."

Alexa nodded in agreement, "I knew it was time to move on to something else, and like you said, to start a new chapter in my life."

Krista interrupted, "But I remember you were skating so well, you were still improving, weren't you?"

"Yeah, and I was injury free, but I think personally, I was just at a point in my life that I wanted to move on. I thought about it, and asked myself, 'okay what did I want to get out of the sport?' I felt like I had accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. At that point landing another triple, or doing another year in Sections, those were all bonuses. I had passed my Senior competitive and qualified for Challenge and I was really proud of that" Alexa responded.

Megan looked at Alexa and Krista, "That sounds easier than my decision. I struggled with it for a really, really long time. My skating wasn't really going anywhere. I was kind of stuck in a rut and had been for a couple of years. So I thought, 'If I'm not fully into this anymore, and I'm not really moving forward, maybe it's time to just move on and find something else that I'm really passionate about.'" Megan stared at the table, "But it wasn't easy. It's so hard to realize that, maybe this isn't what I'm going to do anymore."

"Do you remember when you actually decided to quit?" Keri asked.

"Well, I quit once, but went to tell the skaters, and decided I was going to keep going. I was like, 'I can't do this, I have to stay.'" The whole table laughed before Megan continued, "But seriously, I knew I had to actually make the decision. My parents had done a lot for me. Mom moved away from my dad so I could train in another city, so I felt like, there's no point of me being there if I wasn't 100%. And there was no half assed quitting. My mom was like 'If you're quitting we are going to sell the house, I can't stay here. I sacrificed a lot for you to be here. If you're done, that's fine, and I'm ok with your decision. I'm not going to judge you on it, but it's over. Don't expect to come back.'"

"It's funny," Keri started, "I don't even remember quitting. I know I went to Canadians and I guess I just stopped skating after that, but," she paused as she tried to think back, "I honestly cannot remember it. I don't know if I blocked it out of my head, I don't remember

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saying to my mom 'Don't register me.' I would think it should've been a bigger thing, to quit

something after so long… I would have thought it would have been a really catastrophic and

sad time, but I just don't remember it."

Joe looked at Keri, "You were such a good skater."

Keri coughed a little as if to say she didn't believe him, "I never did that well in

competitions, not in Senior. I could have, but I didn't. So I think the whole time I was like, 'Why

am I doing this if I just can't pull it off on the day?' I remember thinking that it was a waste that

my parents were spending so much money on me."

There was a short pause before Keri spoke up again, "Did any of you struggle after you

quit? I felt really lost for like a year!"

"I struggled with it. It was just over, and there was nothing left for me," Megan replied.

Keri nodded, "I was at school but didn't know what I wanted to do. I remember feeling

like 'I don't want to skate anymore, but I don't know what else to do.'"

Ryan jumped in, "It's so strange isn't it? It's just done. And we're talking like

thousands of hours, from entry to exit, thousands of hours. They say it takes 10,000 hours to get

to the top. With the amount of time, energy, and ability that's put into such a specific and

targeted focus, and that has totally changed your childhood, and your youth… it should have a

conclusion to it."

Alexa pondered what everyone was saying, "You know, for me, the first year after I quit

was wonderful. I didn't have any dietary restrictions. I could have a social life for the first time.

I didn't have to go to sleep early. Freedom had come at last! It was a lot of fun. I didn't really

miss skating that much."

Jared laughed, "Yeah, I had so much more time once I quit. I finally felt I could try out new things. I started dating; that was new for me! I never thought it would be fair to date someone when I was so committed to skating."

"It's funny that you say you finally had time to date. I always think of skating as my first love," Megan said with a laugh.

Alexa was also laughing, "Totally, but then when it's gone… it's like a really bad breakup!" Then she got serious, "Actually, it was probably worse, because it was my entire life. Basically, I had all my eggs in one basket. I didn't have time to do other hobbies. I had nothing, other than my school, which thank God I was good at because it was all I had and when skating was taken away…," Alexa paused and stared at the ice for a moment, "At the end of the day I had nothing, and that was the worst. That was all I had, and when it was gone it was a disaster." Alexa looked at Joe, "How did you know it was time to quit? Was it hard for you?"

"Well, I kind of quit twice," Joe responded, "I had an injury that I really struggled with. After I recovered, I could land my triple axel for a couple of months, and then it went away and I went into a very dark place. Skating was not good. The energy of where I was, was not good."

Everyone was listening intently, "That sounds really hard," Krista said.

"It was," Joe continued, "I knew I had to keep improving Nationally. But I just wasn't catching up to others in my event and without the triple axel, I was not going to catch up. By October I decided I didn't want to skate anymore, so I dragged my feet through the mud, all the way to Canadians." He paused, "It was a really horrible time. I don't remember a whole lot about the competition. I just wasn't ready. I had not prepared because for the last four months, I had been miserable. Anyways, it was what it was, and I stopped skating after that."

"That sounds awful, Joe. Injuries are so hard," Ryan said. "My skating began to taper when I injured my ankle. The injury kind of put a hold on skating. Shortly after Canadians, I had an opportunity to coach, and so I thought, 'Okay I will do that for a bit.'"

Joe nodded, "I started coaching as well. I enjoyed still being involved with the sport, but in a different way, at least until I sorted out what would come next for me."

"Yeah, for sure," Ryan said, "When I took the coaching job I assured my coach it was going to be temporary. And I tried to assure my family this was so much better than skating because I could have an influence and make an impact as a coach touching so many young people's lives. I tried to really promote that."

Megan looked at them, "So did you both keep skating while you were coaching?"

Ryan responded with enthusiasm, "Yeah for sure! I was kind of skating just for fun on my own, and I realized, 'Wow, I can still do this stuff and there is no pressure and I'm enjoying it.'"

Megan nodded, "Me too, I wasn't coaching or anything, but I was working out a lot and realized, 'I'm still really fit, I'm still able to do this'. I went out and skated one day on a public session and within 20 minutes I was doing triple toes and double axels easily. I thought to myself, 'Am I better up here in my head" She laughed, "I think you're right Ryan. I think without the pressure I was just able to do it, and the muscle memory was just there. For a minute, it made me think I should start skating again."

Joe jumped in, "It was really fun to skate. Even though I was at the rink coaching all the time, it was so fun to skate myself. I could still do my jumps. But when I decided to actually come back and compete, the road back was not easy."

Ryan nodded, "Yeah, I came back and competed one last year in Senior, but," he paused, "I just…" Ryan looked unsettled, "Nothing was realized so I just … stopped."

Megan looked at Joe, "Was it the same for you?"

Joe tried to think back to what it was like. "I decided I would come back to do one more competition as a way to finish off my career properly. I really wanted the opportunity to thank all the people who had supported me. But it wasn't an easy journey. I was working a lot, and I was pretty socially developed… there was a lot in my head. I wasn't living as an athlete anymore. I was now living as an adult."

*Jared had been sitting quietly listening to everyone's story. "For all the injuries I struggled with through the years, I was lucky to be healthy for my final season. I almost quit a year earlier though… I actually got some great advice from someone. He asked me, 'Do you feel content with what you've done at Nationals, and what you've done this season, and are you able to walk away with it? Or do you see yourself doing one more year, going to Nationals and having **that** moment, competing in front of a Canadian audience, feeling that adrenaline, and knowing that you'll never get to do it again.' That changed everything for me. Looking at it from that perspective, walking away from that, wouldn't have felt right. I did want that one Nationals that I could walk away from, on my own terms."*

Krista looked at Jared, "But it's not always that easy. I mean, how did you know that the next Canadians is going to be that much better? I always wonder if I would have done better at my last competition if I had trained more that final summer, but there are no guarantees."

Ryan agreed, "Yeah, I came back another season, but I felt like I was a big disappointment to myself, and others. I don't talk about this, it's still a sore subject. I don't think I really finished my job. That's what I hate about my amateur career; I don't feel I realized

my potential. I never performed what I could do at six in the morning at my home club, at a competition at five in the afternoon, when I was in a great physical state." Ryan paused, "I still feel kind of embarrassed and feel a bit ashamed that I didn't reach that potential… especially when my grandpa was picking me up at 5:30 in the morning, and my dad was working on the other side of the country to support this. I still feel a little bit tense around my coach too, because I still feel like I could have done better, I could have done more. And maybe I did reach my potential, but mostly I feel I didn't," he said with an awkward chuckle. "But I tried to come back, and like I said, nothing was realized."

Jared looked thoughtful, "I'm trying to think about what made the difference for me. You know what it was? My goals changed that last season. I wanted to skate on my own terms, and have no regrets. That last season was really good. I accomplished a lot. I skated multiple clean programs. I feel like I did everything I could. But I was doing it all for myself."

7.2.1 Unpacking reflections on transitioning out of figure skating

Here again, the culture of elite sport is captured in the participants' reflections. Participants described unidimensional lives focussed primarily around skating (Coakley, 1992). During their careers as athletes, participants were fully immersed in skating, and the tensions they experienced were normalized. Their single-minded focus on training meant they did not have time for relationships and hobbies outside of the sport. As Douglas and Carless (2015) note, concerns should be raised when an athlete's focus on winning becomes

> the *only* or *primary* focus; that is, when performance enhancement in the quest to win takes over from all other interests, needs, goals and aspirations. When this happens, there is the very real potential of obscuring or normalising a host of maladaptive practices and behaviours. (p. 17)

As participants discussed their decisions to quit skating, they often commented on their placements and improvements (or lack of) at competitions. Douglas and Carless (2015) note that the life of a high-performance athlete, within the performance narrative, focuses on winning as a measure of success. As discussed in Chapter 6, this narrative is embedded within the organizational culture of figure skating and something individuals learn early in their skating careers. Participants evaluated their ability based on this narrative, and their decisions to leave the sport appeared to be influenced by the performance narrative as well as by competitors, parents, and coaches. For example, when Joe discussed his skating during his final years he mentioned he *"had to keep improving Nationally… [he] just wasn't catching up"*. The fact that his personal achievements were falling short of expectations and that he was not doing well in relation to others put him in *"a dark place"*.

Many participants commented on their lack of winning as the way they knew it was time to quit. Keri's comment, *"why am I doing this if I just can't pull it off on the day"*, and Megan's comment that she was *"kind of stuck in a rut and had been for a couple of years"* emphasize the importance they placed on winning. For them, there was no point skating if they were not doing well at competitions, a concern that was amplified when they considered the sacrifices their parents were making for each of them to skate. Several identified the time, money, and effort that others put into their skating as a variable in their decision to quit. Megan referred to the sacrifices her mom had made, while Keri discussed how it was a waste of money if she was not winning. Ryan felt he had let others down and discussed feelings of guilt about his lack of success. These examples demonstrate how participants' interactions with coaches, parents, friends, and competitors influenced their perceptions and emotions related to success. Tensions surfaced more when they did not feel they were meeting performance expectations.

The participants collectively emphasized the adjustments they went through as they started a *"new chapter"* in their lives, and all participants except one discussed the difficult decision to leave the sport or difficult transitions from the sport. As part of this transition, the sacrifices, and restrictions of their skating lives became more apparent and less acceptable. This led to the emergence of additional tensions as participants began to understand what they had been missing. For Alexa, the initial freedom after leaving the sport was exciting, but it was followed by a very difficult time as she did not know who she was without skating. There was no phasing out or gentle transition away from the sport; for most participants, it was an abrupt change that lacked closure, as Ryan pointed out, *"something like that should have a conclusion"*.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the training and competition demands of figure skating created tensions the participants had to navigate, however, the transition away from the sport itself seemed to cause even more significant tensions. These tensions may be a result of various factors. First, there appeared to be little discussion or support from the organization during the transition. Participants, who had been immersed in the life of an elite athlete and accustomed to others influencing their choices about everything from clothing, to training, to nutrition, were ill prepared to adjust to new lives outside of the sport. A second related point addresses the support systems surrounding athletes. While immersed in the sport, participants experienced the stress and pressure of being an elite athlete alongside others (friends, colleagues, competitors, and coaches). However, the entire support system does not follow them out of the sport. Coaches, colleagues, and competitors who remain involved in the sport will have difficulty relating to concerns with retirement as they have not yet experienced it. In addition, as participants are developing an identity outside of the sport, it is difficult to maintain relationships with those still

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heavily involved. As discussed in Chapter 6, Megan could not even keep in touch with her

friends who were still skating, *"because I was so upset with just being done."*

The lack of balance in participants' lives, limited knowledge of life outside of the sport,

and lack of resources to help them with their transition created challenging situations for the

participants in my study. An analogy could be drawn to climbing a mountain. Athletes were

guided to the top of the mountain with varying levels of support. The more successful the athlete

was, the more support they received. However, when they decided to leave the sport they were

left to find their own way off the mountain. They were not provided a map (education), support

(a tour guide), and may have even lost the peer support they once had (as friends still in the sport

continued climbing). The difficulty in transition relates directly to the culture itself making it

important to not only add supports during transition, but also address the root of the problem;

that is, the narrow understanding of success outlined in the culture and performance narrative.

7.3   Success

There was a pause in the conversation as the waitress brought everyone's meals. Alexa

turned to Jared, "It sounds like you had a successful last season."

Ryan laughed, "It's funny how we throw that term 'success' around. I'm not saying

you're not successful Jared, but what is success really? It's so subjective! You could probably

ask 100 people and get 100 different answers," he looked around wondering how others would

define success.

Megan smiled, "The amount of times I've been asked what success is, and I still don't

have an answer."

Keri jumped in, "But it's hard! My idea of success has changed a lot through the years."

"How I measured success definitely changed for me," Jared agreed. "I know my parents used to look at whether I was medaling. I used to really want to win a world medal and make it to the Olympics. For me that would have been success… but in the end, I realized success was much more than that."

Keri reflected on her own career. "I think I thought success was doing well at the very top level. When I was skating, I didn't think I was successful at all. At the time, success would have been winning Nationals in Senior, so I wasn't a successful skater. But now, I know I had lots of Provincial and Divisional achievements, and all the triple jumps but I really didn't admit it, or didn't see that as success. But as I reflect, I think I was a very successful skater."

"Yeah, when you're young you are always pushing to the top level. Now when I look back, I was really successful even without a World medal or the Olympics. I never gave up, despite the hardships. I think that is the essence of being an athlete - never giving up, and always pushing yourself." Jared added.

Megan was nodding in agreement. "In the younger years for me it was results - 100% I'm successful because I got first, or I'm successful because I medaled. I medaled a lot when I was young. I won, or medaled, every single time."

"I won a lot when I was younger too, but your goals have to change," Alexa explained. "It gets harder to win medals, like, when there's 45 kids in Pre-Novice, it is a lot harder."

"Exactly," Megan agreed. "After I stopped medaling all the time, success for me was, 'I'm able to control my emotions today'. It started to become more little things, like, 'oh I had a good day today, my triple toe is getting really strong again'; that's success. Because I wasn't placing as often in the National championships I had to find it elsewhere, to keep motivated. But success for me was only results for a long time."

Krista had been sitting back listening and considering the question. "Doing what you want to do and being happy with it," she said as everyone turned to look at her. "I think that is success. I think I was very successful in skating. My goal was to pass my Senior Competitive and I was very happy with that. If you love it, and you accomplish your goals, then I think you are a successful skater."

There was a short pause before Jared started to speak, "Like Ryan said before, I think success is individualized; it's based on the individual's goals, which change over time. I agree with you Krista, I think success for a figure skater would be, being able to walk away from the sport happy. For me, that is success. And just having no regrets."

Joe jumped in, "At the end of the day, I think success really comes with what you make of the sport. Your parents are pumping money into the sport, and you're training so many hours... but at the end of the day you have to consider why you are doing it. You cannot be doing it for a gold medal, that just doesn't make sense. So why are you doing it?"

*"That's easy to say now, but at the time it is about medals and qualifying... everyone is focused on results. I would get so stressed before a competition. It was **the biggest** thing in the world for me right then. Now thinking back I wonder, 'Why was I so upset? Why did I put that much stress on myself? It's hard for me now, looking back on it and thinking, 'Why were you so scared? What did you think was going to happen if you didn't make it? Would your life be different now if you didn't qualify that year?' It probably wouldn't." Megan said.*

Jared nodded, "I've always had the mentality that sport is just sport, it's not everything. There is a difference between life and sport. It's just a phase of your life, and a part of your path and then you move on to other things."

Joe continued, "Exactly, success has to be more than the medal; medals don't reflect everything you learn in the sport. I would think of myself as being wildly successful in skating, not because of the amount of medals I won or what I went up to, but because I was able to use everything I learned in skating as a platform to do something else in my life really well. I could transfer the skills that I learned in skating to many different professions because I had over a decade of dealing with nerves, stress, disappointment, achievements, success, goals, and work ethic – you know what I mean? I've spent my entire life doing something that demanded all of that at a really young age."

Krista nodded, "I agree, skating taught me about more than just winning, it taught me a lot of life lessons, like determination and working for what you want, and never settling for anything less… I learned it's not always going to be easy, but if it's important, you will do it. Skating taught me a lot of things from a young age, so I would say my skating was a success."

Megan stared at the ice, "My mom still asks me, 'Was it worth it for you? Do you find that you were happy doing it?'" She turned back to the group, "I think now that I have wrapped my head around the whole idea that it was part of my life, I do think I was successful. When I quit, if I was in a fight with my parents I would always say, 'You're just disappointed because I didn't succeed.' But thinking back now, for sure, I was a successful skater, and it made me into who I am today, with high confidence, and the ability to take care of myself."

 "I don't know if I agree completely." Alexa joined in. "I agree that success is more than medals – but, I'm not sure that skating really made me stronger as a person outside of the sport. Let's put it this way, I felt insecure a lot more times in my skating career than I did confident. I was constantly comparing myself to other people because that is what the sport is doing - it's ranking you compared to other girls. And that, as a young girl, can really mess with your head.

Even to this day, I have problems, insecurity issues, and I'm always comparing myself to other

people. Maybe it's good in the sense that I strive to be good, but it's also bad because

sometimes I feel insecure about another person being better than me. I think it all goes back to

what I learned in skating. They don't necessarily teach you how to be a good person. They

teach you how to be a performer and an athlete… but a lot of people are rude, stuck up, and

conceited. I think it is the nature of the sport that gets in people's heads. It's a constant

comparison; you're always trying to be better than other girls. Real life isn't like that. You have

to work with others. There is no collaboration in figure skating."

7.3.1   Unpacking reflections on success

Before I met with each participant I had some idea of what each of them had

accomplished in skating. In my mind, the criteria I used to select them (i.e., having passed the

Senior Competitive test) already put them in a category of a 'successful' skater. As I was talking

to participants about their careers I began to realize they did not all feel the same way about their

success as a skater. In the context of discussing their transition from the sport, many spoke of

their lack of success as the major reason they quit. Without winning, it was time to move on.

However, when I asked them how they would define success, and if they would consider

themselves successful, they explained how their ideas had shifted.

All of the participants told me how frequently they won medals when they were young.

As they moved to higher levels of competition, medals were harder to achieve and definitions of

success had to change. Unfortunately, rather than shifting these definitions of success at the time

(looking beyond winning), many seemed to believe they were 'unsuccessful' right up until the

time they quit. For example, during the period when Keri was immersed in the competitive side

of skating, she was unhappy with her performances and did not feel successful. If I had asked

her, or any of the other participants, to define success before they retired from the sport, or in the year following retirement, they would not have the same responses; many quit because they did not believe they were successful. Only years after leaving the sport, could they look back and realize how successful they had been. In addition, their definitions of success now go beyond winning and medals to include not only what they accomplished in the sport, but also what they took away from the sport.

Growing up surrounded by figure skating, the participants had learned that medals were a symbol of success. For example, Jared's parents focused on medals. This focus, in turn, influenced participants' perceptions of their success at the time. As Keri explained *"When I was in it I didn't think I was successful at all".* After being immersed in the culture that overtly evaluated success in terms of winning, many saw themselves as failures and believed that they had let others down. For example, Ryan discussed his unresolved feelings about his participation and how he had not fulfilled his job as a skater.

Once the participants moved out of the culture and began living a life outside of skating it seemed they could re-evaluate their participation. For many, it was important for them to re-frame their experiences as they came to terms with the time and effort they had put into the sport. For others, time away from the sport provided an opportunity to look more objectively at what they had done realizing the high level they had actually achieved. Within the high-performance sport culture there are few indicators of success outside of medals. While the new judging system allows for some comparison of personal scores at different competitions, there are limited discussions about personal bests.

While some spoke of transferable skills that they learned through skating, all participants appeared to go through a significant transition period in leaving the sport and not all the

experiences they took away were positive. Alexa, for example, confirmed that skating itself often made her feel insecure. The sport, she explained, is about comparison and competition; it taught her to question herself and when she wasn't receiving the rewards (medals, attention), she felt insecure. The comparison she learned through skating continues in her everyday life. Alexa's story speaks to the potentially negative consequences of a culture focussed on comparison and winning and aligns with authors such as Coakley (2015) and Eitzen (2016) who have highlighted the myth of sport as a character building endeavour.

7.4   Would You Do It Again?

For a moment, everyone was quiet and immersed in thought. Jared looked back at the ice just as the Juvenile men began to step on for their warm-up. "Wow, they look so small. It's hard to believe we were that little."

"I was super gangly at that age," Alexa said with a laugh. "Would you do it again?" she asked the group.

"Yes, totally," Ryan said almost jumping out of his chair. Everyone laughed at his enthusiasm, "Wouldn't you all?" he asked.

"Parts of it, I would," Krista said and turned to Megan. "You would, wouldn't you?"

Megan paused, laughed, and began speaking, "If I had…" she paused again, "Yes. I would for sure if it was from the beginning including the years that I was doing well and was really happy doing it. But I kind of ended it badly… like in the end it was pretty negative. But I would do it again for sure, if it was from the start. What about you Alexa?"

"You know, it's hard, because, I don't have any regrets. I'm really happy with how it all turned out. And I think it's made me the person that I am today, but there were a lot of things that I may have done differently. I did a half-day program at school, and that was a decision

that I made. But, I think after being outside of skating and knowing that there are other things that are very important too, I think I would have maybe tried to keep my life a little more well-balanced. Maybe tried some other sports. But, no, I would definitely do it again and I'm definitely happy with how everything turned out in the end."

Keri was still staring out at the ice, "I think I would do it again, I don't know, like I loved it, I had a really good experience with it. There are a lot of bad things that came out of it, and a lot of good things. I wouldn't put my kids in it," she said in a very matter of fact way. "For me, skating is part of who I am now, so I would do it again. But I don't think I would put my kids in it, just knowing how stressful it is and how much money it costs and all of that."

"I wouldn't either," Jared said quickly. "Just because…" he hesitated, "I see different things for my kids. I would prefer that they were a dancer or gymnast maybe, kind of the same thing, but just a different type of athletics I guess. Like you said Keri, skating is very expensive. Very, very expensive. I feel like in dance, it's a bit easier to be successful at it. There are a lot of really great skaters but it really comes down to the three best in the world. Whereas in dance I feel like you can be supremely talented and not be the best in the world, but still be successful."

Ryan considered what everyone was saying and with a bit of hesitation, he began to speak, "Yeah, I would, I would put my kids in skating." He paused, "I think knowing what I know, I think that I can, not shield them from things, but I can guide and direct them. Because I think kids learn from falling on their face, and picking themselves up; you need to encourage that. I would encourage my kids to be involved in skating because it is unique. It's not like anything else. It's an individual sport that demands a high degree of technical proficiency and focus, as well as the artistic end of things, the creative side of things. I just think it develops so

many skills. But I think asking more questions, and being more involved in the emotional side of things would be where I would do things differently."

Alexa considered what Ryan had said, "Maybe you could protect them a bit, but to be honest, I would really not consider putting my child in it. As much as I love it, I think psychologically it's really not healthy."

7.4.1   Unpacking their reflections if they would do it again

The question, 'Looking back, would you do it again?' was deliberately phrased to invite the participants to think broadly and critically about their overall experiences. It was based on a similar question that Donnelly (1993) used to elicit his participants' perspectives on their own experiences. Approximately 20% of 45 participants responded with an unqualified, "Yes", while the largest number (65%) said, "Yes", with the caveat that they would do it knowing what they now know, so they could address any concerns and make changes (Donnelly, 1993). Just under 10% said "No" they would not do it again (Donnelly, 1993).

This question touched me personally and I felt it was a critical question to include in the interviews. Over the past 20 years I have asked myself this question many times and without hesitation I have always felt that, of course I would do it again; I loved it. I was proud to be a figure skater. In fact, it was not until I began coaching and critically reflecting on the experiences of other figure skaters that I considered that not everyone would feel the same way. As I began this research, and revisited the question with a more self-reflective perspective, I wondered if I was looking back at my skating with 'rose coloured glasses' and focusing only on the positive elements. There is a widely accepted view in western culture that we should 'live without regret', and I began to question if my quick affirmative response was indicative of my unwillingness to regret, or my inability to imagine a life different than what I had lived. Skating

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was a major part of my life for 25 years and saying, "No, I would not do it all again," would mean I regretted 25 years of my life. Further to this, I was aware of the social context of my response. That is, I questioned how the social conditions surrounding my experiences as a skater, such as my skating club, coaches, parents, and friends influenced my response. Would saying "No" mean that I wished my parents had made different decisions for me when I was young? Would it diminish the value of time, money, and effort that others spent on my involvement in the sport?

When I asked the participants if they would do it again, their responses reflected many of the thoughts that I had. Although Alexa indicated she did not regret anything, she still seemed to be navigating tensions around this topic. Other participants were also hesitant when asked if they would do it again with Keri saying she did not know if she would and Megan saying she would only if she could do it from the very beginning because she had more fun in the early years of skating. Only Ryan and Jared answered with an energetic and definitive "Yes". Despite hesitations and tensions, all of the participants I asked[27] confirmed that they would do it again. It remains unclear if their positive response was because the good experiences outweighed the bad, because being a skater was a part of their identity, or because they were unwilling to live with regret.

Like Donnelly (1993), I followed up by asking if the participants would enrol their children (or imagined children) in the sport. Asking this question removed the potential perception of participants regretting their lives, while still providing insight into their overall

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[27] Joe was my first participant. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to ask Joe if he would do it again during our three interviews, and he became very busy and could not schedule a fourth interview.

feelings about the sport. The question of enrolling children in the sport provided an opportunity to be honest about their frustration with the culture of the sport. Almost 40% of Donnelly's (1993) participants said they would not enrol their children and of the 60% that said they would, many said so with the belief that their experience would permit them to protect their children. The responses in my study were similar to those in Donnelly's. Many said they would not enrol their children, and those who said they would, qualified their responses with the idea that they could help their child navigate the sport in a more positive way.

7.5 Figure Skating Culture - 'The System'

Joe sipped his drink as he considered what Alexa had said earlier about not developing transferable skills in the sport and the sport not being psychologically healthy. "It's so important to develop the person beyond the athlete, and really consider how what you are saying and doing as a coach is impacting them," he said.

Ryan nodded in agreement, "It is. The sport itself can be so rewarding, it's unfortunate to see people leave the sport unhappy and not associating with it again."

"But it doesn't always feel like coaches are concerned about developing the person beyond the athlete…" Keri said.

Joe took a deep breath, "That's where it gets complex, because even though we want to think about the person outside of the sport, during the actual process of training skaters, the goals that we set are obviously quite high, and we are not going to beat around that bush, you know what I mean? If a parent is saying they want their kid to go to Nationals one day, and the kid thinks they can do it, and professionally I think they are good enough, but then they're telling me that they only wanted to skate three days a week, I would say, 'Okay, no, then you should just go play baseball and be recreational'. That's where it can get complicated - because it takes

*dedication to achieve their **skating** goals. If you want to be elite it is going to demand a lot of your time and money."*

Alexa jumped in, "You're right, they have to be fully committed almost to the point of overtraining – as bad as that sounds. You want skaters like that because they will power through everything and that's what is going to make the kid succeed in the sport." Alexa paused, "And you want the kid that doesn't do any other sports, just focuses strictly on skating, eats, sleeps, and breathes skating, because 'woohoo' they are so gung ho, they are going to be amazing," she paused and then added with an awkward laugh, "And then they turn 19, quit, and probably end up plummeting into a hole."

"But that's the expectation, right? That people sacrifice everything to win – that's what the Section and Skate Canada want; they want people who win," said Ryan.

"I don't know, sometimes I do see them championing people that have gone on to do something else. Every now and then an article will come up at skatecanada.ca about somebody that wasn't a megastar – but did something cool outside of skating," Joe said.

"Do you think so?" Ryan said unconvinced, "Let's put it this way, dealing with figure skating is a little bit like dealing with Versace and Gucci, and all the top line. They are always looking for the Spring 2015, and who remembers Spring 2012? Nobody knows, nobody cares. It's so yesterday's news, and it will be gone now. You might see it lingering around the bus stop or something, but it's not fresh, it's not new. It's not what they want to look at or talk about."

Joe paused, "Sometimes I feel like money controls a tonne of it. Skate Canada is a business, they have a budget. The task of marketing and keeping the engine of figure skating going is hard right now, compared to 15-20 years ago. So, I try to understand Skate Canada is a business, it's not a platform for personal wellness."

Krista laughed, "So much for the 'skate for life' motto."

"Any business can say what they want to say, you really have to take that all with a grain of salt. At the end of the day they are a business and they are just trying to survive," Joe replied.

Megan jumped in, "But isn't the whole point of skating to have fun? I agree that there has to be some intensity to training, but sometimes the training is over the top - I remember lots of days being scared shitless. We were not allowed to talk on the ice. If our coaches saw anyone at the boards drinking water too often they'd get mad. It was really intense that way."

"Yeah, but it should be tough. Maybe in a more a recreational atmosphere everyone could go through it with all smiles. But the competitive path can be tough, it calls for your eight-year-old to skate five days a week, and I'm going to yell at them when they fall, and they have to get up right away. And if they sort of hurt themselves, they have to keep going anyways," Joe said, "That's just what we are trying to achieve. But it doesn't mean that if your child doesn't win they're a failure. It doesn't mean that they should skate seven days a week. It doesn't mean that you should never take a holiday. It's about educating the people that are involved, that yes, this is our goal. This is what you asked for. This is the type of organization you're in. So this is our standard, but at the end of the day we're still people."

"But does it have to be that way?" Megan questioned Joe, "For me, if I was goofing around and super happy before a session I would skate well. But my coach would think we weren't focussed and ask, 'Why are you laughing and giggling? Why are you not visualizing before practice?' But if I was focussed, I would panic. I would skate my best when I didn't think about it."

Alexa took a deep breath, "It's okay to goof off sometimes, but I don't think I would have accomplished nearly as much if I hadn't sacrificed so much. I needed the push. Sometimes my

lessons would end in tears, but I needed the tough love. I needed for people to get angry at me,

that's what helped me push through the frustration. If people kept holding my hand and telling

me it was okay I would not have gotten as much out of it."

"You know what made it even harder? It was so intense, and then it's just over. There

was no support during the transition." Megan said.

Alexa agreed, "There really was no one to talk to about it. I talked to one volunteer with

the Section quite a bit, but other than her, there was nothing. I think that's a problem. I know

for me, it was one of the hardest times in my life, but I guess it's not really up to the Section."

Alexa looked at everyone and became more passionate in her response, "There should be more

support during the transition, but whose responsibility is it? It's not the organization's

responsibility, is it? Their job is to look at you as an athlete. They don't really care about you

as a person. It would be great to have some other programs and opportunities for skaters once

they have finished their competitive careers, but who is going to do it? The Section doesn't have

enough resources to be able to implement programs for everyone who quits skating at a

competitive level."

"I don't think it's the role of the organization to ensure skater wellness because they are

removed from the skaters. The people who are going to have the immediate effect on the skaters

coming out of the sport with goodness, proper health, and a good psychological state are the

coaches and parents who are dealing with them every single day" Joe explained.

Ryan nodded hesitantly, "Maybe, to some extent, but you can't say the organization

doesn't impact individuals throughout their careers. The Section and Skate Canada have so

much power over what you can and can't do. When it comes to international assignments and

funding, they have a huge influence on individual lives. My family and coach were supportive, but if the organization isn't supporting you, which it wasn't supporting me, you're screwed."

"But Skate Canada does not have enough direct contact with athletes - maybe one seminar a year, maybe one monitoring session," Joe paused to consider his words. "It goes back to the coach to make sure that that information is filtered to the athlete in a respective way, with the right timing, you know? Maybe I can take it with a grain of salt because I went through it as an athlete and I understand that what is going to happen, is going to happen, and Skate Canada will choose who they choose for internationals."

"But the process about getting selected was not clear. I was reaching the benchmarks and still not being given international assignments all the time." Ryan said.

Joe hesitated, "Yeah, you're right about that, I remember it being vague and unclear… And I watched a lot of my friends get left off teams. I watched a lot of really talented people just achieve nothing, there was probably a lot of that going on," he paused. "I just really think it all comes down to how it's delivered from the coaching team. At the end of it, you have to make sure your athlete is not very aware of what is being said and done. The details of what is being said by the Section, or what is being decided and why, should never come to the athlete. I know that the experiences that happen to you while you are in that system stay with you for life, so I better be careful with them."

Ryan sat back in his chair and reflected, "Things could have ended very differently for me. I feel like I was a success story, in spite of Skate Canada, not because of them. You're right Joe, the coach has a lot to do with it. I was a success story because of my mentor, my coach. Skate Canada would like to believe that success is directly because of them, and that they are trying to help you, but it's very much a façade."

7.5.1   Unpacking 'the system'

In this portion of the dialogue, I drew on participants' comments about the broader social system of figure skating including coaches, the Section, and Skate Canada. After hearing their hesitations to put their own children in the sport, I was surprised that participants were not more critical of the overall culture and the organizations. Many seemed to believe there was no possible alternative to the currents system of figure skating, namely, that a focus on training, competition and self-discipline at a young age was necessary to reach a goal of successful elite athlete development locally, provincially, and nationally. The participants who remained involved in the system as coaches, became instrumental in re-creating and reinforcing the very culture they had themselves been a part of which led to paradoxical positions on the part of some of the participants (Smircich, 1983). For example, rather than question the dehumanizing procedures used to assess an individual skater's prospects for team selections, Joe felt it was important to shield athletes from any discussions about them, leaving the process of team selections itself intact. In contrast, I would recommend a more transparent system where athletes know more clearly what they need to do to make teams and attend invitational competitions.

Participants also spoke about difficult transitions from the sport, and many commented that, like concerns with mental health, there were no tools or programs available to them to help them during their careers or through their transitions. Despite their awareness of the issue, however, they were not clear on whose responsibility it was to help athletes with transitions. As Alexa put it, "*Their job is to look at you as an athlete. They don't really care about you as a person.*" Along similar lines, despite Skate Canada being a not-for-profit national sport organization, Joe felt they were a business, not a "*platform for personal wellness*", and it did not seem to occur to him or others that the organization could both develop elite athletes and aid in

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the development of well-rounded, healthy individuals outside of the sport. The assumption appears to be that there is no alternative model to the present one; developing elite athletes requires some tears and unhappy participants, and not everyone will make it. While Douglas and Carless (2015) suggest creating alternative narratives for athletes, I have not seen any research that presents an alternative model of high-performance sport.

A major consequence of the participants believing that their experiences, including the tensions, frustrations, and discomfort they endured, were part of what made them an elite skater, is that it limited their ability to consider alternative models of elite sport. As coaches in the system, rather than challenging aspects of the system they did not like, they have become instruments in re-creating the problematic culture that continues to focus on outcomes and performance above individual well-being (Smircich, 1983). I have realized, through my research, how despite my best intentions as a coach, I too was an instrument in re-creating the existing system of unequal power, gender, race, and social class. I am unsure what exactly lead me to begin to see my own tensions more clearly and then leave the system. Perhaps it is my overall love for the sport. As I spoke with the participants who had been highly involved as coaches I was drawn in by their energy and passion as they discussed developing elite athletes. I realized how much I missed coaching, and missed seeing skaters improve and develop under my guidance – and then I realized, that much of what I was getting excited about was again reinforcing many of the conditions I was critiquing. Even with my critical researcher lens, the culture of figure skating has been normalized within me, and will be difficult to shift. Change, if it is to happen, will have to be incremental.

7.6   Overview: Thinking with Stories

The purpose of this chapter was to examine research question three: How do participants reflect on their experiences, and the related questions of how perceptions have changed since retirement, when participants became aware of tensions, and what new tensions might have emerged since retirement. In this section I provide a brief overview of the main findings related to these questions followed by a deeper discussion of the social conditions, temporality, and place that are illuminated when presenting the data in dialogue form.

Over the past 25 years, since I stopped competing in skating, I have spent considerable time reflecting on my experiences in the sport. I have considered whether I was successful; if I could have accomplished more as a skater had I not started coaching so young; and if I had children, would I put them in skating? When I was fully immersed in the sport I did not view it in a critical way. Similar to McMahon and Penny's research (2011), I viewed the sport culture as a normal. Once I retired from coaching, and skating was no longer a major part of my daily routine, I had a more diverse range of experiences to compare to my time in the sport which allowed me to reflect on my participation from a different perspective. I approached the interviews with these personal reflections in mind and was interested to find many similarities between my own and the participants' accounts of their experiences.

When exploring how participants reflected on their skating I became aware of the complexity of participant experiences. For example, participants talked about the intensity of their participation and the constant pressure they felt from parents which appeared to be a major tension at least at some points in their careers. Nevertheless, they tended to justify this tension as a necessary condition and important part of their development as athletes. Participants' reflections about quitting were also complex. Their rationale for ending their skating career, was

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typically stated in terms of their lack of success with respect to the performance narrative, including that they were not winning medals anymore and they were no longer accomplishing anything. However, as they reflected on their overall accomplishments in the sport, they reframed their experiences and described the ways in which each of them *were* successful. For example, the participants described the multiple lessons they learned from the sport and explained how the sport made them who they are now.

Discussions about tensions relating to lack of mental training and support during their transition were also complex. While participants believed further support was necessary, they quickly dismissed the idea that the organization should be responsible for providing it. These stories of shortcomings and contradictions in the system of figure skating were grounded in a belief that the tensions participants experienced were individual issues. They did not make connections between their individual anxiety and stress and the broader skating culture. By looking at participants' stories together, we can see similarities between them and how individual experiences occur within a broader social context.

In relation to how participants' perceptions have changed since retirement, I found that most tensions emerged after participants had retired from the sport. Participants tended to view their circumstances and feelings as necessary and normal when they were immersed in the sport. After retirement, it was easier for participants to reflect on their experiences in a more critical way. For example, when Megan discussed the importance of competitions she explained, *"I would get so stressed out before a competition. It was **the biggest** thing in the world for me right then. Now thinking back I'm like, 'Why was I so upset? Why did I put that much stress on myself?' It's hard for me now, looking back on it and being like 'Why were you so scared? What did you think was going to happen if you didn't make it? Would your life be different now*

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if you didn't qualify that year?' It probably wouldn't." Megan's comment highlights how the participants' perceptions changed over time, a point that will be further explored when discussing temporality.

In addition to changing perceptions, I was interested in when participants became aware of tensions and if any new tensions had emerged since retirement. I learned from the interviews that there was not a precise moment in time when they became aware of tensions, rather awareness typically came following time away from the sport. The constructed dialogue demonstrates the new awareness participants experienced. For example, Joe discussed how when he returned to skating after taking time off he became more aware of his negative feelings and actions. The normalized expectations of being an athlete become more apparent when looking at them from a fresh perspective such as from the outside or after the fact. New tensions also tended to emerge as participants began reflecting on the sacrifices they made during their skating careers. For example, Alexa explained that it was her decision to cut back on her regular schooling to allow for additional training. However, as she reflected on her decision it became clear that she now experienced tension in relation to this decision; she was now more aware of the consequences of her decision in terms of limiting her academic and social development.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, an important analytical focus in narrative inquiry is to explore the social conditions, temporality, and understandings of place embedded within peoples' stories about their experiences. As outlined in Chapter 2, a narrative perspective enables us to understand peoples' social position and the limits and pressures they endure as part of their social, cultural, and physical circumstances. The participant's interview responses that I have used in the dialogue, demonstrate how participants focussed on their own feelings and emotions in describing what it was like to have been a high-performance skater and now be a

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retired skater. This is strikingly similar to how they reported tensions, as they tended to place the burden of responsibility (and blame) inwardly on themselves and not on the system, people, and the conditions around them. We can, nevertheless, look outwardly through their narratives to the social structures, organizations, and contexts reflected in their comments and see how their stories are situated. Participants were well aware of the impact of organizations, including the Provincial Section and Skate Canada, in relation to scheduling, training, competitions, team selections and more. They were also acutely aware of the social system of figure skating; in fact this was arguably a more pervasive subject of discussion than that of the skating clubs or Skate Canada. Skaters not only discussed their success in relation to others (competing against others, keeping up with other skaters) and to how their families sacrificed aspects of their lives for them to be involved in skating, they also emphasized the integral role that coaches played. These examples suggest that participants fully understood that their activities occurred within a broader social context, yet ironically the force of their critique remained mainly on their own conduct and 'failings'.

I operationalized 'temporality of experience' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in my research by interviewing the participants on multiple occasions and discussing the different phases and time lines of their sport participation including getting involved, training, competing, and retiring. By presenting this information in a dialogue, I have attempted to demonstrate the interconnectedness of social conditions, place, and temporality as I understood them from the interviews, and to highlight the importance of temporality as a condition of story making and story telling. Each of the participant's stories was constructed in the interview based on previous experiences and influenced by the interview setting (Clandinin, 2013). As seen in the dialogue, the participants' reflections on their experiences changed across their skating careers and after

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their retirement. In earlier parts of the dialogue, for example, we saw Alexa explaining that she loved her experience as a skater and felt that she had accomplished what she wanted to accomplish. When discussing transitioning from the sport, however, we learned that she did not feel like skating was healthy psychologically because it teaches individuals to constantly compare themselves to others and limits opportunities outside of the sport. Finally, she recognized how as a coach it is best to work with skaters who are completely dedicated and do not participate in sports and hobbies outside of figure skating. At this point she is re-creating the scenario that she felt was not positive for herself as an athlete. Presenting a continuous dialogue, such as this, highlights the temporality and tensions within the participants' experiences in a more organic and engaged manner than would normally be the case in traditional analyses.

Narrative inquirers are also expected to be attentive to place within stories and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Place refers to both where the original experience took place as well as where the stories are being told to others. Participants told me their stories knowing that I had also been highly involved in the sport. Throughout the interviews, I often shared my own stories as a way of asking questions, or responded to their stories with a story or observation of my own. I was able to relate to many stories, such as the spitting and yelling that happens during training sessions, the 'feel' of ice arenas on competition days, the anxiety and stress participants experienced, the decision to stop competing, and the difficult time of transition that came after quitting skating. Because I could relate to the cultural and place-based specificity of their stories it is likely that I heard a different version of their 'high-performance figure skater' story than they may have told a reporter or someone who had not been involved in the sport. The dialogue in this chapter deliberately captures this context by highlighting the 'sharing' of information that might happen when skaters get together.

By using the participants' own accounts in a fictional context, I was able to explore the impacts of social and cultural influences on their lives, and demonstrate convergences and divergences of their individual experiences as well as the connections between their individual lives and the broader skating culture.

Chapter 8: **Discussion and Implications**

In Chapters 5 through 7, I took an integrated approach to using theories and methods from the literature on organizational culture and narrative inquiry to examine the experiences of former figure skaters. In this chapter I briefly summarize my main research findings in relation to the research questions as well as a provide a discussion about organizational culture and the performance narrative more broadly. I then comment on the value of the integrated approach I undertook, including the contributions it makes to the literature on organizational culture, narrative inquiry, and high-performance sport. I also present implications for practitioners and for knowledge translation. I conclude with a discussion of the study limitations and implications for future research.

8.1   Summary of Findings

As a former figure skater and professional figure skating coach, I came to this research with a love for the sport and decades of wonderful memories. However, there was a fine line between these positive memories and experiences and the growing concerns I had about the state of high-performance figure skating, and high-performance sport more broadly. While the sport has potential to have a positive impact on those that participate in it, I believe the sport is falling short of its potential and creating unintended (negative) consequences for many individuals.

I approached this research using narrative inquiry, which, at its core, is a study of experience. To fully understand experience, Clandinin et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of being attentive to tensions, that is moments where personal experiences, values, and beliefs collide with broader societal or cultural narratives. This study focussed on the tensions of high-

performance figure skaters as they walk or 'skate' this fine line. My research addressed three research questions which I have detailed below.

8.1.1 RQ1 What tensions do former figure skaters identify in relation to their experience as high-performance figure skaters?

In the first question, I was interested in learning what tensions former figure skaters identify in relation to their experiences. While I noted many tensions throughout the interviews, I found that they were not readily identified by the participants themselves. That is, participants were not always explicitly aware of tensions, or they took them for granted and accepted them as necessary in their journeys as elite athletes. While participants themselves did not necessarily label the situation or condition as a tension, I categorized it as such based on how the participant spoke about what happened, the impact it had on their lives as figure skaters, and my own feelings of tension as I listened. In Chapter 5, I provided examples of four tensions that all participants discussed. Using excerpts from the finalized research texts, I presented findings in the form of vignettes related to four broad themes: the lifestyle of a skater, injuries in elite sport, monitoring bodies, and financial concerns. Further tensions were then identified in Chapter 6, as I began to examine and situate the athletes' experiences within the broader figure skating culture. In this context, focusing on the organizational culture and performance narrative(s) of figure skating and high-performance sport, I identified tensions related to the recurrent emphasis on the Olympics, competitions, the value of winning, and the importance of music, choreography, and appearance in the overall performance of elite figure skaters. In Chapter 7, I explored participants' reflections over time. Here again, new tensions were identified and discussed such as those related to competitions and training, mental health, the system of skating, and transitioning from skating.

In total, I identified and analyzed 14 different tensions discussed by participants. This does not constitute, nor is it intended to constitute, an exhaustive inventory. Notably absent, for example, are tensions around sexuality and masculinity in the sport. This is an area that has been discussed in depth by Adams (2007, 2011) and others, and that did come up in my interviews with participants. However, I chose to focus this dissertation on narratives surrounding competition and performance because these comprised the focal point for the dissertation, and because these areas were more universal and more pervasive in the interviews. Also, tensions around family, while mentioned during interviews, are not explored in depth in the dissertation. While important to participant experiences, I felt more detail in this area would be tangential to the focus on organizational culture and the performance narrative.

Throughout interviews, the uncritical acceptance of the sport ethic was quite evident. Participants normalized many aspects of their participation as they believed that discomfort and tension were necessary parts of being an elite athlete. Participants typically placed the 'blame' for the tensions on themselves, perceiving the concerns or issues they experienced as individual problems. For example, stress and anxiety were attributed to personal shortfalls rather than excessive pressure. Participants navigated tensions in a variety of ways. Some athletes 'lived the part' of an athlete, fully accepting what was expected of them, while others 'played the part' of an athlete moving in and out of the athlete role as they attempted to maintain their own lives and identity outside of sport.

8.1.2 RQ2: How are these tensions related to their experiences of the organizational culture of figure skating?

In my second research question, I was interested in understanding how tensions related to participants' experiences of the meanings, symbolism, values, artifacts, and assumptions within

the organizational culture of figure skating. Major findings in relation to this question are explored in Chapter 6 where I examine how values of performance are embedded in every level of the sport's organizational culture (Schein, 1990, 1992, 2010). Artifacts, such as medals, stories, rituals, and ceremonies, highlight the importance of comparison and competition in the culture and give insight into deeper values and basic assumptions about winning and success. The chapter highlights how participants become part of the culture and accept its localized terms and conditions which in turn serves to reinforce and re-create the culture's broader values and norms. The absence of critical reflection was once again notable as participants sought to justify tensions, such as a lack of choice in costumes and music, as necessary in their pursuit of excellence. This acceptance was conditioned by the broader assumption that their coaches and other individuals in positions of power, such as choreographers and nutritionists, knew what was best for them. Without critical awareness and denaturalization of these underlying values in the culture of figure skating, there is little opportunity for change.

8.1.3   RQ3: How do participants reflect on these tensions over time?

In Chapter 7, I used a fictional dialogue, to explore findings related to the third research question and to re-emphasize how tensions are embedded in the culture of figure skating. The point of the dialogue was to juxtapose the participants' personal accounts in one framework, and to allow commonalities and differences to surface. The dialogue was constructed of excerpts from the interviews and remained true to the participants' circumstances and experiences as reported in the interviews; only the context and interpersonal interactions were fictionalized.

Participants appeared to become more aware of tensions and to begin to think more critically about their experiences after they were no longer immersed in the culture and had an opportunity to reflect. With time and distance from the sport, many became more aware of the

sacrifices they had made and the negative implications that some aspects of the culture had on their mental health and well-being. As participants reflected more critically on their experiences during the interview process, some discussed the need for changes, such as implementing mental training as part of the early development of athletes. However, the root of the problems (or potential solutions) were rarely considered at a cultural and organizational level. Interestingly, even after critically reflecting on personal experiences, those who remained in the sport after retirement as coaches or performers, re-adopted the norms and values of the culture and became part of their ongoing re-creation. For example, although participants identified various aspects of the culture that were problematic (such as the lack of balance in their personal and sport worlds, limitations with socializing outside of the sport, and restrictions or barriers to their academic development because of their training), as coaches, they seemed to encourage the same behaviours with their own students, believing this was the only way to create elite athletes.

8.2   Reflecting on Narrative Inquiry

Drawing heavily on Clandinin and Connelly, in this dissertation I have explored the subjective and complex experiences of seven former figure skaters. Thinking narratively about experience, I have been attentive to sociality, temporality, and place. Exploring experience socially, I looked inward to personal feelings and emotions and then outward to the social and cultural context where the experience took place (Clandinin, 2013). The participants' stories demonstrate the influence of parents, coaches, Section members, and peers as participants navigated through their skating careers. Temporality of experiences is demonstrated through the changing perceptions and actions identified by participants (Clandinin, 2013). For example, as participants discussed their success in the sport it became apparent that their perceptions changed as they moved through the sport and then changed again after retirement. Narrative inquiry helps

illuminate the complexity of stories, contextualizing them within a broader social setting and allowing the reader to see how they may shift over time. Consideration of place is another key component of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). The stories individuals create and subsequently relate to others are responsive to their context and will tend to vary according to the settings in which they tell the story. Therefore, throughout the project, I was attentive to the settings in which the original stories took place as well as to the interview contexts in which the participants shared their stories with me.

Integral to the process of narrative inquiry, I have been attentive to my place in the research. I have used text boxes to demonstrate my thought processes and reflections in relation to my experiences as a skater and a coach. These experiences helped me engage with participants, and provided me a further opportunity to explore concepts and ideas. This explicit focus on my positionality as a researcher helped me gain deeper understandings of high-performance figure skating as I unpacked my personal assumptions. For example, in Chapter 6 I present my reflections on the costume and music choices I made for one of my skaters. Through a self-reflexive exploration of these choices, I became more aware of how I had personally internalized notions of appropriate clothing and music that were broadly normalized within the culture of high-performance figure skating.

In this research, I have used narrative inquiry as both a theory and a method. My narrative approach was inspired by my interest in both learning *from* and *through* stories. I used "writing as a method of inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005); the process of writing was a way of developing my ideas and clarifying connections within and between participant stories. The stories presented in this dissertation are excerpts from the larger narratives I created for each participant. I had two goals in the creation of narratives. First, I wanted to further understand

participant experiences and second, I wanted to use stories to elicit feelings and emotions in those who read them. As Ellis (1999) suggests, a good story "evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 674). Following Denison (1996), I wanted participants' stories to be the focus of my writing, rather than writing "in a way that centered on theory, where my subjects' voices would be buried beneath layers of analysis" (p. 352). By presenting narratives, I have been able to maintain participants' voices while providing the reader with a more complete picture of my participants. This also provides readers an opportunity to think about each story in relation to their own experiences before reading my analysis as a researcher. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, "the narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications" (p. 42).

8.3   Theoretical Contributions to the Literature

My research makes a theoretical contribution to the literature by integrating two theories, organizational culture and narrative inquiry. I also extend the sport management literature by using a critical management studies approach to organizational culture. Finally, my research contributes to the high-performance sport literature and begins to fill a gap in research on the experiences of figure skaters.

8.3.1   Integrating organizational culture and narrative inquiry

In this dissertation, I have integrated theories and methods from narrative inquiry and critical organizational culture to enable an exploration of individual lived experiences within a broader culture (Clandinin, 2013). Critically examining culture at the same time as focusing on participant experiences helped me further understand how culture is re-created in organizations.

There are a number of similarities and differences between the theoretical approaches that make the integration of the two particularly interesting.

Stories, an artifact in organizational culture, can be a way for individuals to make sense of the world by situating "biographical experiences in larger historical and sociological contexts" (Alvesson, 2013; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966). Similarly, in narrative inquiry, stories are understood to be a way that individuals make meaning out of experiences as they are related to broader factors (Clandinin, 2013). As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain, "the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experience are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (p. 42). Throughout the dissertation, I have made connections between individual stories and broader cultural dimensions demonstrating the complementary nature of organizational culture and narrative inquiry approaches.

Organizational culture, through a critical management studies approach, is less of a rigid theoretical framework and more of a way of thinking about organizations. Thinking culturally about organizations has encouraged me to look deeper than formal value statements to access meanings, symbols, power, and taken-for-granted assumptions (Alvesson, 2013). Once again, this aligns well with narrative inquiry-based research that seeks to understand nuanced personal experiences and culture. Thinking narratively, like thinking culturally, involves exploration of experiences in a fluid and dynamic way in contrast to theoretically driven projects that begin with a more rigid framework of understanding.

There are also some notable differences between these two theoretical approaches. With the exception of Martin's (2002) three perspectives framework, research on organizational culture tends to focus on "socially shared and not personally idiosyncratic meanings" (Alvesson,

2013, p. 4). That is, it aims to uncover shared meanings within an organization, not individual ones. Martin's (2002) research highlights complexity within organizations and recognises differences in individual perspectives by identifying fragmented and differentiated aspects of culture as well as the shared integrated culture that Schein's (2010) work addresses. Mills and Hoeber (2013a) employed Martin's (2002) framework to understand artifacts of a figure skating club. Findings revealed not only integrated perspectives of artifacts, but also various individual perspectives that were not shared among all members (i.e., fragmented and differentiated). Missing from these studies, however, is an understanding of how individuals experience the various cultures in an organization. That is, while some organizational culture research acknowledges that not all aspects of a culture are shared, the framework does not invite direct analysis of individuals' experiences in relation to the culture(s) surrounding them. Of particular interest in my research were these individual experiences in relation to the shared understandings of performance expectations of elite figure skaters.

Narrative inquiry begins with the experiences of individuals themselves and explores the underpinnings of these experiences including their socio-cultural antecedents. Using narrative inquiry and organizational culture approaches together enabled me to explore shared values and assumptions in the organization as well as individual experiences. Although it is important to acknowledge there may be alternative cultures and subcultures, in this research, I have focussed on the participants' understanding of performance and competition within the culture of figure skating, which is to say that I remained attentive to both individual narratives and shared cultural aspects of the sport. One perspective did not override the other, rather I moved between them in a complementary fashion. This approach helped me understand the culture in more depth, while

understanding that experience occurs in the interplay of culture and individual identities and responses.

A further benefit of combining narrative inquiry and organizational culture is related to the relevance and transferability of findings. Theoretically-driven research, such as traditional approaches to organizational culture, tend to focus on one aspect of culture (e.g., artifacts, values, basic assumptions). While identifying aspects of the culture can be useful on its own, individual experiences tend to become hidden in the formal analytical process and academic language. Approaching culture in a narrative way may help avert this loss of the 'lived experience' and relevance of the findings as well as make my research accessible to a broader range of individuals and groups who may not be familiar with the theoretical frameworks and associated language. Stories can help to highlight the ongoing creation and re-creation of culture at a personal level. Presenting individual stories provides an opportunity to think about and further understand organizational culture and can provide deeper insight into the ways in which culture is experienced, reinforced and normalized.

8.3.2   Extending the literature on organizational culture in sport

To date, there is minimal research using organizational culture theory in a sport management setting. Limited research in this area has focussed on a specific layer of culture, for example values (Hoeber, 2007a, 2007b; Hoeber & Frisby, 2001) and artifacts (Mills & Hoeber, 2013a). Alternatively, research using an organizational culture framework has employed a pro-management approach assessing satisfaction in fitness centers (Macintosh & Doherty, 2005, 2010). To my knowledge, no organizational culture research on sport has employed a critical management studies approach, extending Schein's and Martin's perspectives to explore historically rooted and naturalized aspects of culture through a deeper understanding of meanings

and interpretation (Alvesson, 2013).

This dissertation employed a critical management research perspective on organizational culture, seeking to examine performativity and naturalized elements of the culture while engaging in reflexive research practices (Alvesson, 2013). Taking a critical approach to organizational culture, I have focused on meanings and values and explored how individuals experience the culture (Alvesson, 2013).

8.3.3   Extending understandings of high-performance athletes

In her 2011 book, *Artistic Impressions,* Adams explored gender and regulation of masculine and feminine movements, concluding, "figure skating has more potential than many sports do to help us think differently about the relationships between sports, gender, bodies, and styles of movement. It's a waste not to use it" (p. 238). Further to Adams' observation, there are additional dimensions of figure skating, including its individual focus and its emphasis on artistry and athletics, wherein success is determined through quality of movements as well as the execution of skills, that make it an especially interesting case for exploring the performance narratives embedded within high-performance sport. Through my narrative inquiry with former figure skaters I began to address the lack of research on the experiences of figure skaters. By using a narrative framework to focus on tensions, I was able to further explore the complexity of the lives of the seven former figure skaters and how their experiences are related to the broader culture of the sport.

My focus on tensions is unique not only to research on figure skating, but on high-performance sport research more broadly. My findings have extended the sport literature by engaging in a more nuanced discussion of the problematic nature of the performance narrative that pervades contemporary high-performance sport. There are several branches of research that

have engaged with the complex issues that surround high-performance sport. Coakley (1992), for example, noted that many of the personal problems that athletes experience are rooted in broader social issues that need to be addressed before real change can be achieved for athletes. By comparison, some of the work on the performance narrative (itself a core feature of high-performance sport) has situated the problem and potential solution within the athlete, suggesting that athletes need to construct and deploy alternatives to the performance narrative in order to mitigate its effects (Douglas & Carless, 2015). This position fails to account for the ways in which the performance narrative itself is deeply embedded in the culture of high-performance sport at every level of participation making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find and live alternative narratives. The data I present in this dissertation suggest that athletes must manage themselves *within* the system of evaluation on which the sport system is built – a performance based system where winning is valued over embodied experiences. In this way, regardless of the individual's motivation or goals, they *will* be ranked and compared to others, which will in turn influence their experiences including the attention they receive, their funding opportunities, and so forth. Therefore, it is not enough to build a space and secure support for alternative narratives, rather we must also consider shifting, reimagining, or re-creating the overriding performance narrative in the sport itself. To do so requires a deeper understanding of the ways it is embedded within the organizational culture of the sport and highlighting, from the perspective of athletes themselves, the tensions that they navigate within that culture.

8.4   Implications for Sport Practitioners, Coaches, and Administrators

This dissertation highlights the tensions that athletes navigate in conjunction with their involvement in the high-performance sport of figure skating. Many tensions are related to the organizational culture of the sport; however, cultural change may be difficult (Alvesson, 2013;

Schein, 2010). A major finding in my research is that the participants were not at the time overtly aware of, and did not critically reflect on the tensions they experienced in conjunction with their participation in the sport. My findings support the conclusion that athletes had been socialized into the culture and did not have an alternative basis on which to evaluate their experiences. The result was that they did not question many of the choices they made until after they left the sport and had achieved a broader perspective on their lives. The young age at which participants start their careers means it is unlikely that the skaters themselves will have the life experience and means to critically evaluate their contexts. Therefore, the burden for improving the lived conditions for young athletes in the sport falls on the coaches, parents, and administrators in the sport system.

A noteworthy tension the participants identified was the lack of mental training and support they received during their careers. One step that Skate Canada (as well as provincial organizations, and clubs) could take is to develop and distribute information booklets and hold workshops for coaches, skaters, and parents outlining the importance of mental health and strategies to ensure healthy development through the sport and beyond. Based on my research findings, I would suggest implementing mental training early in an athlete's development. Many clubs are now offering off-ice sessions as part of regular training. These programs often focus on developing strength and flexibility, but could also incorporate mindfulness and mental skills training. As skaters develop and move through the system, the mental training would shift as their needs shift. This could include information about careers, preparation for post-competition life including renewing relationships with family and friends, and support for athletes in their final years of skating and the first year out of skating as they navigate the transition. Stories, such as the ones presented in this dissertation, could be used to demonstrate the importance of

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developing mental health strategies and elicit discussions on a variety of topics, (e.g., performance and competitions, pressure to win, the role of the athlete in decision making).

Based on the narratives of former high-performance figure skaters, I believe it is necessary to decrease the emphasis on competitions and winning as the only measure of success. Further to this is the need to increase emphasis on the process of skill development itself. All participants discussed their love for being on the ice, however, they also reported that during their careers they did not see themselves as good skaters. Their constant need for comparison and extrinsic results led them to leave the sport and to believe that they were failures. Small shifts are beginning within Skate Canada (see epilogue), however, important discussions about the subtle ways outcome-based measures of success are reinforced (e.g., through artifacts, rituals, and ceremonies) are necessary in order to educate coaches, parents, and leaders about the extent of these issues. Unless efforts are taken to reposition success as an individually defined achievement there is a risk of continuing to perpetuate the problematic norms within the culture.

While introducing mental health resources is a concrete, and relatively straightforward step, shifting the culture around competition, performance, and gender norms requires a broader awareness about the problematic aspects of the sport. This dissertation has attempted to highlight a variety of participant experiences demonstrating the importance of critically examining taken-for-granted, normalized aspects of the sport. It would be difficult to change the culture without individuals within the culture first believing there is a need for it.

I believe sharing stories and starting discussions using stories may be a way to create awareness within the culture, the first step to making change. For example, a blog or booklet of narratives could be made available to members of the skating community. Interested individuals could then compare their own stories with the narratives they read which would invite a process

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of 'thinking with stories'. Rather than offering an explicit critique of the culture, the blog could

be used to engage readers in discussions about normalized aspects of the culture, encouraging

discussions amongst readers. As a result, athletes may be able to better identify and speak up

about their feelings to parents, coaches, and administrators, using participant stories as an

example. Even when the scenarios are different from situations facing a family at the time, they

may help initiate a useful dialogue about the pressures athletes experience.

Providing education for coaches, parents and administrators could also help illuminate

aspects of the culture that are sources of tensions, leading to gradual change in the culture. For

example, information sessions and discussion forums could be held for parents and competitive

athletes. Tensions identified in this dissertation could also be explored and discussed during

coach and judges training. Douglas and Carless (2008) researched the use of stories in

professional development seminars for professional golf coaches by presenting performance,

discovery, and relational narratives from their research. Stories stimulated interest and

discussion among the multiple practitioners attending the seminars (Douglas & Carless, 2008).

Similarly, presenting stories from my research at coaching seminars could elicit discussions

about coaching philosophies and how actions as a coach may impact athletes over the long term.

In addition, stories could encourage judges to critically reflect on the expectations they are

placing on athletes. For example, discussions surrounding music, costuming, and the overall

emphasis on appearance could be explored in relation to the hypermasculinization and

hyperfeminization of the sport, concerns with weight, and long term consequences of comparison

based on image.

8.5   Strengths and Limitations

Conducting multiple in-depth interviews with each participant was one of the strengths of my research, and provided two main benefits. First, meeting multiple times gave me an opportunity to develop a rapport with each participant, getting to know their stories in more depth. Participants often expanded on stories they had told me in earlier interviews as they became more comfortable with me. For example, in the first interviews with Alexa, her stories focussed mainly on positive aspects of her participation; any negative situations were noted briefly before quickly moving on. In contrast, in the third interview, she expanded on her stories and commented that she enjoyed being able to look critically at her experiences and talk to someone who understood her frustrations, but still loved the sport. The second benefit of multiple in-depth interviews was my ability to reflect on each interview, transcribe it, and write down questions to clarify at the following meeting. This was particularly beneficial given the unstructured interview design I employed which led to interesting divergences as participants reflected on their experiences but often left me with unanswered questions at the end of our discussions.

To organize the vast amount of data I was collecting, I created summaries of each interview and then compiled all the data into a narrative for each participant. This was another strength of my research as it created a cohesive 'story' about each individual. The process of creating individual narratives helped me get to know each participant very well. I regularly found myself able to draw on a specific quote or idea because I had a more complete 'story' of each participant and therefore could remember the context within which it took place.

While the lengthy narratives I created were beneficial for me as the researcher, I did not receive any feedback on them from the participants. This lack of feedback leads me to a

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limitation of my study. While I explored topics alongside participants, engaging in conversational style interviews (a key component of narrative inquiry), our conversations stopped abruptly at the end of the last interview. Although I gave participants an opportunity to reflect on the narratives I wrote, I did not receive feedback. Each narrative was over 30 pages and was likely overwhelming for the participants to read. In addition to length, participants may have had a difficult time reading their own words and experiences on paper as grammar and sentence structure in spoken language often varies from that of written language. While participants appeared to appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their experiences during interviews, it was clear that their lives were very busy. In sending them my complete summary narratives at the completion of our interviews, instead of brief summaries at the end of each interview, it is likely that I missed opportunities for further reflection. Although my summaries took considerable time to compile, and participants did not respond to them, I believe the process of creating them was integral to my understanding of participant experiences and therefore worth the investment of time.

A second limitation of my research relates to my knowledge of the programming and policies at various times over the years. Since the participant's careers spanned more than 30 years, each participant was influenced by slightly different Skate Canada or Section programming, policies, and initiatives. My insider perspective as a former figure skater and coach served me well and gave me more knowledge than someone who had not been directly involved, however, I do not have records of all the changes that occurred over the past 30 years nor do I have information on the philosophies behind the changes. In retrospect, interviews with current coaches and executive members could have been useful to answer important questions about the broader system. For example, participants mentioned a lack of mental training at the

time they skated. Interviews with administrators would help to clarify if it was perhaps available for some but not all skaters.

8.6   Future research

I see three main areas for future research. The first envisions continued research into the experiences of figure skaters. As noted above, there is limited research in this area, and while my research begins to fill the void, further exploration of skaters' experiences at different levels and in different disciplines would be very valuable. For example, the number of skaters competing at the Senior Competitive level is much lower than the number at Juvenile and Pre Novice levels suggesting many skaters are leaving the sport early[28]. Future research could explore narrative experiences of younger skaters still competing in the sport and with skaters who left the sport at lower levels.

Second, a longitudinal study following a few skaters as they progress through different levels could provide further opportunities to explore the temporality and sociality of experiences as individuals' progress through the system. A project designed to interview three to four skaters and their parents twice a year beginning at a Juvenile level for three or more years would uncover the changes in perceptions and experiences over time. In addition, interviews with other stakeholders such as coaches, parents, and siblings would be a valuable asset to understanding narrative tensions from multiple perspectives. Also, as discussed above, interviews with coaches and executive members could provide details about the status and impacts of rules and regulations that the participants may not be aware of or were unclear about.

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[28] At the 2017 Skate Canada BC/YK Sectional Championships (held in November 2016), there were 45 Pre Novice Women and 9 Pre Novice men and only 7 Senior Women and 4 Senior Men.

The third area of future research relates directly to the current sport system. To fully understand the culture of figure skating it is important to explore the written and unwritten policies and procedures at local, provincial, and national levels. Research into the policies and procedures, including interviews with top executive members making these decisions, could provide a more complete picture of the organizational culture's taken-for-granted assumptions and naturalized aspects of the sport.

Chapter 9: **Epilogue**

9.1   Changes to Skate Canada's STARskate system

At the time of writing my dissertation, Skate Canada was in the process of transitioning to a system where coaches would evaluate skaters at lower levels. During 2016, Skate Canada developed and began implementing changes to the STARskate test and competition formats to align with developmental philosophies outlined in the Long Term Athlete Development model (LTAD). While many clubs had already begun transitioning to the new framework, all coaches and clubs are now expected to implement the new STAR 1-5 guidelines beginning September 2017. The STAR 1-5 guiding philosophies include: a) golden age of learning, b) removing barriers for progression, c) strong focus on basics, d) introducing more complex skills earlier and allowing for a better foundation for development, and e) creating a better bridge from CanSkate to figure skating (Skate Canada, n.d.).

Major changes include allowing coaches to evaluate their own skaters at lower levels of competition. Removing judges for lower levels reduces costs to skaters and allows skaters to move up to a higher level as soon as they are ready instead of waiting until a scheduled test day.

A second major change will take place at competitions. Skaters at entry levels will no longer be evaluated based on their comparative achievement (that is, comparison against other skaters), instead they will be evaluated against a standard. Skate Canada has begun changing the system of competitions for lower level skaters so that skaters can receive gold, silver, bronze or merit awards based on the skills they have accomplished. Instead of ranking skaters, where only one skater receives a gold, silver or bronze, in the new system multiple skaters may reach the gold standard and receive a certificate. This is a good initial step, as it moves away from comparative ranking of participants at a very young age. Skaters can now work to improve

individual performances and mark their progress based on the certificate they achieve at each competition.

Future research is also needed to explore how recent changes in the evaluation criteria of the lower levels are being interpreted and implemented. For example, are new rules making a difference and leading to a focus on individual improvement over comparative ranking? Are skaters now comparing themselves based on how many gold rankings they have achieved? As noted above, the performance narrative is deeply embedded in the culture of figure skating and the changes do not move away from this narrative continuing to emphasize 'gold' standards and continued outcome based improvements. In addition, there is always the possibility that the new criteria will simply be rearticulated in terms of the old systems of comparison, unless the coaches themselves deliberately shift their focus to individualized performance rather than to winning. An obstacle to the latter process is that the reputation of most coaches at this time is predicated on the achievements of their athletes such as how their athletes have done in regional, national and international competitions. As long as coaches continue to achieve recognition based on the competitive success of their skaters rather than development of well rounded athletes, it will be difficult to shift the culture and performance narrative.

The goal for humanizing the sport of figure skating may end up being restricted to the younger years. Without shifting the end goal of Olympic competition and therefore the ideals of competition and winning, it is difficult to minimize the focus on the overriding performance narrative in the sport. This is where counselling and mental training become important mediators to help athletes learn to balance their expectations and careers.

9.2   Mental Health Initiatives and Resources for Transitioning from Sport

Following the 2010 Olympic Games in Canada, two reports were compiled. The 2010 Olympic Games debrief report, made recommendations to address the importance of life-sport balance and post-sport career planning and the 2011 business report examined athlete transition report for Canadian athletes. As a response to these reports, multiple organizations including the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC, Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institute Network (COPSIN), and Sport Canada to create Game Plan. The Game Plan program's mission is a "total 'wellness' program that strives to support national team athletes to live better and more holistic lives… during their high-performance career and beyond" (Game Plan, 2016, para. 1).

The website links to resources under headings of career, network, education, skill development and health. However, to access these resources, you must be a Game Plan eligible athlete. Only athletes who receive Sport Canada funding are eligible. Therefore, while some athletes will benefit from resources, high-performance athletes who have not met specific performance standards to become 'carded' athletes, will not have resources available to them under this programming.

In addition to targeted programs, such as Game Plan, there appears to be a changing climate in relation to mental health resources and awareness for athletes and in broader society. Campaigns such as Bell Let's Talk, and Olympian Clara Hughes' discussions around her own mental health challenges have helped raise awareness and destigmatize mental illness (Hughes, 2017). Many of the study participants discussed the lack of mental training they received, and research on athletes and the current system is needed to explore if sport psychology and other mental health resources are more common and more accessible now. It is also important to

consider if programming is integrated throughout the development of athletes or only suggested when there is a 'problem'.

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview Guide

The following is a rough guide of the questions I asked. Due to the unstructured and life history style of the interviews, specific questions varied.

Introductions/ General discussion
- Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me.
- The purpose of this project is to understand what it was like for you as a high-performance figure skater. I am interested in your stories, good and bad, as you reflect on your experience. I would like to ensure you feel comfortable throughout the discussion. Please let me know if you are uncomfortable discussing topics as they come up, and only share stories that you want to share.
- I will be recording the entire interview and then transcribing it for analysis. Your name, and any identifying names/situations within the stories will be removed and/or given pseudonyms.

Becoming involved
- Can you tell me about how you got involved with skating?
  - Encourage details such as when they started, when they became more involved/competitive, what their overall experiences were like
    - When/where did you start?
    - When did you start competing?
  - Can you describe some of your favourite moments as a skater?
    - Defining moments?
    - Do you remember landing your first axel / double axel / quad?
  - Can you describe some of your least favourite moments as a skater, that you are willing to share with me?
  - Programs
    - Music?
    - Costumes?

Family
- Was your family involved in figure skating themselves?
- Was your family involved in your skating? (e.g., volunteering; watching)

Typical day
- What was a typical day for you at different ages when you were learning to figure skate?
  - When you were under 10 years old
  - 10-15 years old
  - 15 +
- Can you tell me a bit about your training? What type of activities did you participate in?
  - How often did you train? (how many months/days/wk)
- How often did you compete?
  - What did you think of competitions?
- Describe the coaching you received
  - How many lessons did you receive?
  - Did you have more than one coach?
  - How would you describe your coach(es)?
- How would you describe your parents' involvement in your skating?
- Who made decisions about your training? (i.e., did parents, coaches, and athlete meet)

- o Did you have many interactions with the section?
- o Judges?
- o Monitoring?
- o Have there been scenarios where you have disagreed with the decisions others were making
- Tensions
  - o Did you feel you made any major sacrifices during your career?
  - o Can you describe any difficult decisions you had to make during your career?

Injuries
- Did you have any injuries throughout your career?
  - o Can you describe your injuries?
  - o How did you deal with your injuries?
- How did those around you deal with your injury(ies)?

Artifacts
- Did you keep many artifacts – would you like to take photographs or bring some in?
- What are your most cherished artifacts?

Culture of the club
- What was the environment like in your training facility?

Ending your involvement
- Why did you stop skating?

Reflecting on your involvement
- What types of tensions did you experience throughout your involvement?
- How did you navigate these tensions?
- **Rather than actually ask these questions, they will likely come out of broader discussions and be furthered through probing
- Looking back on your experience, what do you think of your experiences?
  - o Do you see them differently now that you did then?
- Given the opportunity to do it all again, would you?
  - o What aspects of your participation would you change?
- Can you explain what you think an ideal training program would be?

Completion of interview
- How did you find our discussion today? Did you enjoy talking about your experiences? Did anything make you uncomfortable or uneasy?
- What questions do you have for me?

UBC

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Narrative Experiences of Former Figure Skaters

Consent Form

Robert Sparks, PhD (Principal Investigator)
Kinesiology

University of British Columbia

Cathy Mills, MSc
Kinesiology

University of British Columbia

Contact Number: ████████████

████████████████████

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Skating the Line: A Retrospective Exploration of How Former Figure Skaters Navigated the Tensions of their Sport*. You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

1. Competed at a Senior Competitive level in figure skating and
2. Competed at a Sectional Championships since 2000 and
3. Are 19 years of age or over

Purpose of the Project: Cathy is interesting in learning about the stories of former figure skaters in relation to their experiences as high-performance athletes. The information gained from this study will help us better understand the ways participants navigate tensions within the sport.

This research project is part of a doctoral degree in Kinesiology. Results of this study will appear in Cathy's doctoral dissertation and may be published in academic journals and presented at academic and/or non-academic conferences.

Participation/Procedures: If you agree to participate you will be invited to spend time with Cathy discussing your experiences as a figure skater over the course of 3-5 months. During this time you will meet with Cathy 3-5 times. The location of these discussions will be of your choice (at a time convenient for you) and will last approximately 1-2 hours each.

Discussions may include questions such as "How did you get involved in skating?", "What was your favourite moment in your time as a competitive figure skater", "Tell me about your first competition at a Senior Competitive level", "What was your least favourite moment as a competitive skater?", and "Why did you decide to stop competing?" If there are issues you do not wish to talk about, that is fine. You do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. You are also welcome to ask Cathy questions, and bring up discussion topics you would like to talk more about.

If you are interested, you will also be encouraged to:
- take photographs to reflect feelings/memories of your skating
- write stories about your experiences as a skater
- create a memory box of artifacts and photographs related to your skating experiences
- and/or go on skate-alongs with the researcher as a way to engage in further dialogues about your skating.

In between meetings with Cathy you can keep track of your reflections or ideas through photographs and written journaling. These additional memories can then be discussed at future meetings. You may give the writing/photography to Cathy and discuss it together during meetings, or use it purely as a reminder of what you would like to discuss (in which case Cathy will not see them directly).

All discussions will be tape-recorded and transcribed in order to analyze the information you provide. Throughout the research project Cathy will be discussing the research findings with you and we will have an ongoing discussion about which photographs and stories you are comfortable sharing.

Potential risks of the study: There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. However, some reflections stimulated by questions or discussions might upset you. Please let Cathy know if you have any concerns or become uncomfortable at any time. Some of the questions we discuss may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

Potential benefits of the study: This study will provide you the opportunity to reflect on and discuss your experiences as a high-performance skater. While you may not experience direct benefits from the study, you can help other people learn about the experiences of high-performance figure skaters (e.g., it may help inform clubs, coaches, and administrators about skaters' experiences).

Confidentiality: Information you share with Cathy throughout the research process will be made anonymous, whereby no personal information that can identify you will be made available within any reports, papers or presentations that may result from this research. If you wish, you may choose your own 'research name' to be used in reports.

Although all identifiers will be removed from the transcripts, the uniqueness of your story may be identified by those who know you are part of the study, or know you as an individual. Therefore, while Cathy will not identify you, or discuss your participation in the study, it is important to be conscious of who you tell about your participation. If a particular concern is identified (e.g., a story that has the potential of revealing your identity) we will discuss opportunities to further anonymize the story.

Primary data (i.e., transcripts, photographs, etc.) will only be available to the principal and co-investigators of the study. All identifying information will be removed prior to conversations with Cathy's supervising committee.

Storage of Data: All information gathered throughout the research process will be stored in a locked cabinet and/or kept a password protected computer.

Remuneration: You will be given a journal and a small gift certificate as a token appreciation of your time.

Your Rights: Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences. If you have any questions or want further information about the study please contact Cathy Mills at ████████████. Alternatively, If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent: I consent to take part in this study, *Skating the Line: A Retrospective Exploration of How Former Figure Skaters Navigated the Tensions of Their Sport*. The study has been explained to me and I understand what is involved.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences. I understand that if I do not wish to answer any question or discuss any topic that is raised, I may refuse to answer and the interviewer will go onto the next question. If I withdraw from the study, the information I have supplied (tapes, notes) will be destroyed.

I am willing to take part in one or more conversations over the next 3 – 5 months and understand that these may last approximately 1-2 hours, and I am happy for the conversations to be tape-recorded.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records. I also understand that any identifying characteristics will be removed from the information I supply so that my anonymity is protected.

By signing this form you have consented to participate in this study.

SIGNED…………………………………………………………………………………

NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS…………………………………………………………..

DATE……………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix C Reflexivity

Reflection 1: Researcher or therapist

My previous experience as a skating coach also influenced other aspects of the interview. As a coach, I would frequently have discussions with my skaters about their lives, goals, and dreams. When I meet with my skaters now, as adults, I continue to give advice and pep talks discussing the strengths I saw in each of them throughout their skating ('once a coach always a coach'). Many participants in my study were the same age as some of the individuals I coached and as I began to develop a rapport with participants I sometimes began to feel like 'Coach Cathy'. As a researcher, I was careful not to fall into this role. However, frequently throughout our discussions, I felt a bit like a coach/therapist, listening to participants' feelings of doubt about their careers and/or troubles with transitions out of the sport. I found myself wanting to 'coach them' and wanting to show them critical sociological research on sport that highlights how some of the struggles they were describing were part of a bigger systemic problem (and not their fault). However, with participants this was not my role, nor was it my objective. I refrained from giving advice, while being attentive to their stories and asking questions that in some cases allowed participants to come to new realizations on their own.

Reflection 2: Personal experiences of monitoring weight

My relationship with figure skating is complex. I enjoyed learning to skate, perfecting skills, and the friendships that I made throughout my involvement. My parents were very supportive and my coaches had high expectations but also had a positive and well-rounded approach to my development. As I began to write this dissertation, I was aware that the 'happy story' I often painted of my own participation may be an exaggerated reality as I hesitated to speak negatively about the people closest to me who supported my skating. I was also hesitant to question some things about my own experiences as a skater too deeply as they may expose old wounds that I did not want to address. When I began this research, I wanted to leave my personal stories and experiences aside. However, as I read more literature, I frequently found myself flashing back to scenarios from my past that I had not thought of in years.

For example, as I read about eating disorders and body image issues in figure skating two distinct moments come to mind. The first scenario took place when I was quite young, maybe 10 or 11. I was in the dressing room listening to a conversation between two older skaters – "[coach] just told me I must have been 'putting in a little overtime with the fork and spoon over the holidays". While nobody talked to me directly about my own weight, this story impacted the way I thought about my body and my own eating habits. The second scenario took place six years later, as I was getting into the car with my friends. We were all laughing when Michelle looked into the rear-view mirror. "I have smile lines. I haven't had smile lines in so long." We all stopped laughing and looked at each other unsure what to say next. Michelle had been struggling with anorexia, and this was the first time I had seen her since her treatment. The fact that she could see smile lines meant that she had gained weight. After a long pause, she said "It's good, I'm glad I can see them". We all breathed a sigh of relief.

Reflection 3: Reflecting on my coaching practices in relation to hair styles

As I listened to Keri's story I had a very emotional reaction when she told me her coach made her cut her hair; I was appalled! The thoughts that ran through my head were judgmental: "How ridiculous, how extreme… and for what? To create a reaction? To get noticed?" As I processed my reaction, I considered my own experiences as a skater; my coaches and I always discussed together what I would wear and I don't have any memories of them suggesting I should keep my hair short or long… so I questioned why I was having such an intense response. As I shared the story (anonymously) with a friend, I realized why it was so familiar, and why I was so troubled by it. I had done something similar as a coach.

We had been preparing for Provincials, and Julie was skating very well. She had just started landing her double axel – something that only a few skaters at her level could do. She was on track to do very well this year – maybe even win. She had a cute orange skating outfit that suited her and her music perfectly. Then, two days before the competition, she showed up with orange hair. I was furious – this was not the look we were (or more importantly, I was) going for. The hair clashed with the dress – what would people think? What would the judges think? Orange hair did not fit the traditional skating look. While it was too late to change the colour of her hair back, when we showed up at the competition we (I) decided that she should skate in another dress that was blue – not the orange dress. This example of me trying to dictate the colour of Julie's hair was no different to Keri's coach having her cut her hair. Both stories were about a coach's power and control and the expectations of appearance in skating.