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The meaning of competitive sport in the lives of baby boomers navigating retirement

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ABSTRACT

By the year 2030, all baby boomers will have turned 65 and will represent more than 20% of the Canadian population. Within Canada, this aging population is expected to increase healthcare costs by an estimated 50%. Many baby boomers have adopted a proactive approach to long-term health and aging which challenges historical concepts of retirement. Considered a critical time for influencing health-related behaviours, retirement may provide a window for the promotion of sport. Older adults are underrepresented in sport compared to other age groups, yet there is evidence to suggest that sport participation is increasing among the age 65+ group. This study explored the nature of sport participation among baby boomers (who train for and compete in masters sport events) to understand its role in navigating life post retirement. Specifically, this study sought to capture how participation may facilitate social connections, health, and wellbeing among retirees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with retired baby boomers born between 1946-1965 who regularly participate in sport (e.g., track and field, hockey, tennis). The data captured ideographic descriptions, personal beliefs, and meanings of the role of sport in their lives. Major themes included how sport is a tool in the transition to retirement, the importance of sport for life, and the need for opportunities to engage in meaningful competition. Findings suggest that sport-related social relationships, daily habits, and behaviours contribute to a positive retirement experience which may offer continuity in the health and wellbeing of aging baby boomers.

DEDICATION

To my husband Jeff, for his unwavering love and support. To my mother Dawn, who encouraged me from a young age to embrace my love of physical activity. Her life journey ended before the completion of this thesis, but I know she was proud of this undertaking and is smiling over my accomplishment.

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NOMENCLATURE

Ageism: The stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination which affects how we think, feel, and act towards others or oneself based on age.

Age-graded: A formula to calculate an age factor for every range (e.g., 50-54) which stands as the best possible outcome an athlete in that category should be able to produce. This provides an opportunity for meaningful competition as it offers athletes of all ages a way to compete against each other.

Aging stereotypes: Unchallenged myths or overstated beliefs associated with aging which generalize how older adults should behave and what they are likely to experience with no consideration for individual differences or unique circumstances. They are entrenched in verbal, written, and visual contexts within society.

Baby Boomers: A cohort born between 1946 and 1965 that increased the global birth rate by 15%. Within Canada, this translated to 8.2 million babies.

Biographical perspective of aging: This perspective recognizes the value of everyone's story in providing meaning through the aging process. It argues that aging is an individual experience and choice of coping strategies and resources will be unique to everyone. This life course approach promotes meaning making through the many life transitions which make up an individual's life story (Chapman, 2005).

Biomedical perspective of aging: This perspective is characterized by operational measurements of health and function (e.g., cognition, mobility; Rowe & Kahn, 1997). It is based on the premise that age-related declines are avoidable with proper risk reduction measures (e.g., nutrition) and that usual aging patterns (e.g., experiencing declines such as frailty) are unsuccessful.

Competition: "The act or process of trying to get or win something (such as a prize or a higher level of success) that someone else is also trying to get or win" (The Britannica Dictionary, 2022).

Continuity theory: An aging theory which suggests that individuals may adapt to age-related changes by maintaining consistency in their lives, and health and wellbeing later in life can be developed or enhanced through seeking new activities and social networks in the absence of previous sources (Atchley, 1989).

Flow: Flow is described as a positive psychological state achieved when there is a balance between a challenge and the skills to meet that challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

Frailty: A condition that is often diagnosed in older adults with the presence of three or more factors inclusive of weakness, unintentional weight loss, exhaustion, slow walking speed, and low physical activity levels.

Free play: Play that is unstructured, open-ended, and self-directed by children.

Healthy Aging: Represents the continuous process of optimizing opportunities to maintain and improve physical and mental health, independence, and quality of life throughout the life course.

Master Athletes: Older adults who train for their sport and compete at a high level outside of a typical athletic retirement window (e.g., average retirement age is 30 years for most professional athletes; Wylleman & Reints, 2011). These athletes compete in events with other older adults in age groupings that help to keep it fair and competitive (e.g., age groups are traditionally in five-year increments up to 100 years of age).

Model of selective optimization with compensation: A model which is based on the premise that losses will occur (e.g., job, spouse, mobility) and older adults find ways to compensate for these losses as they age.

Psychosocial perspective of aging: This perspective relies on subjective measurements related to one's health and wellbeing (e.g., social support, purpose, spirituality; Baltes & Baltes, 1990). It is based on a model of 'selective optimization with compensation' which suggests that as losses occur (e.g., mobility due to hip replacement), older adults compensate by adjusting their goals and then selecting the resources which will optimize their performance toward these newly established aims (e.g., physiotherapy and switching from running to cycling).

Physical Activity: Energy expenditure resulting from bodily movement, physical activity can include exercise and sport, along with functional movement created through everyday activities like working or leisure.

Retirement: A life transition represented by a permanent withdrawal from the workforce and a transition into a new phase in life. Often seen as the start of old age, retirement is full of major changes to personal resources including income levels, available free time, and social networks (Maddox, 1966).

Serious Leisure: Associated with Stebbins (1992), serious leisure can be described as the "systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (p.3).

Social Capital: Social capital is the potential ability to obtain resources, favors, or information from one's personal connections demonstrated in the form of individual trust, social support, and associative relations (Lin, 2001).

Sport: A sociocultural phenomenon which connects people through physical activity with a goal to prepare for and participate in competitions to obtain individual and socially significant results.

Successful Aging (SA): Originating with Rowe and Kahn (1997), in their model of successful aging, SA is based on three biologically based criteria which are 1) absence of disease and disability, 2) continued cognitive and physical functioning, and 3) active engagement in life.

THESIS

Introduction

Between the years 1946 and 1965 the global birth rate increased by 15% (Fry, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2019). Within Canada, this translated to the birth of 8.2 million babies who became part of a global cohort known as the baby boomers (Statistics Canada, 2015; 2019). Increases in life expectancy further contributed to the relative size of this cohort in Canada (Foos & Clark, 2016; Fry, 2020). By the year 2030, all older adults considered to be part of this baby boomer generation will have turned 65 years of age. This aging of the baby boomers is significant, as they currently represent 24.9% of the Canadian population with a reported 60% experiencing at least one chronic medical condition (Bardach & Rowles, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2022). Combined with the fact that older adults use a disproportionately higher portion of health care services, demographers expect this group to continue to have a serious impact on our health care system (D'Ambrosio et al., 2019; LeRouge et al., 2014a; 2014b).

In Canada, health care is the biggest budget item for every province with costs substantially higher for adults aged 65 and older (Globerman, 2021). Total health care expenditures for individuals aged 65 and older are projected to increase from $74.61 billion in 2019 to $110.04 billion in 2030, an increase of 47.5 percent (Globerman, 2021). Much of this cost will likely be attributed to the treatment of age-associated conditions and injuries related to physiological declines which typically increase the need for medical or other interventions (Clegg-Thorp et al., 2013; Wister, 2016). These declines are part of normal human aging (often referred to as senescence) and include progressive deterioration of bodily functions over time (Goldenberger et al., 2002). Aging can

escalate bone and muscle related losses including sarcopenia, osteopenia, and osteoporosis (Nielsen et al., 2018), cardiovascular diseases (Lavie, 2019), some cancers (Patel et al., 2019), and diabetes (McGregor et al, 2018; Taylor, 2014). These declines often limit mobility, increase frailty, and negatively align older adults with a 'decline' model which associates an aging body with illness, overall loss of competence, and increased dependency on others (Dionigi et al., 2013; Foos & Clark, 2016; Ng et al., 2015).

It is well known that regular physical activity can help to reduce or delay the onset of age-related disability and disease, including counteracting the negative age-related changes to neuromuscular functioning, power, and strength (Fragala, 2019; Phoenix & Bell, 2019; Phoenix & Orr, 2017). Defined as energy expenditure resulting from bodily movement, physical activity can include exercise and sport, along with functional movement created through everyday activities like working or leisure (Langhammer et al., 2018). Public health organizations perceive physical activity among older adults as a preventative way to reduce health care spending due to associated outcomes related to maintaining quality of life and autonomy (Merom et al., 2012; Zaidi & Howse, 2017).

In anticipation of the adverse effects of an aging population, many countries including Canada have adopted the *World Health Organization's Framework for Healthy Aging.* This framework is based on the premise of successful or healthy aging which encourages the maintenance of physical activity and social participation through the lifespan (Foster & Walker, 2021; Pickard, 2019; WHO, 2015; WHO, 2018). There is a general understanding that aging is a complex phenomenon which requires an

understanding of the social, psychological, and biological factors that contribute to optimal outcomes. As such, the framework (WHO, 2018) is informed by underlying assumptions, models, and perspectives of several aging theories which are further explored in the literature review. To support an aging population, Canadian public health messaging (e.g., Public Health Agency of Canada's Physical Activity for Older Adults; Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guide for Older Adults) attempts to influence societal views of aging to ensure older adults are provided with opportunities to participate in physical activity (Gallagher et al., 2006; Zaidi & Howse, 2017). With the youngest of the baby boomer cohort now entering retirement, it is critical to continue to meet the needs of this population by providing opportunities for older adults to increase their physical activity. This is especially important because chronic diseases which can be avoided or reduced through regular physical activity, increase significantly in the decade following retirement (McPhee et al., 2016).

However, despite the known associated benefits, physical activity in general diminishes as age increases with just 37% of older adults aged 65 years and older meeting the minimum weekly recommended guidelines for physical activity of 150 minutes (Boulton, 2018; CFLRI, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2021). Justine (2013) suggests the low compliance may be due to real and perceived barriers to participation for older adults, including a lack of knowledge, time, facilities, and the lack of a companion as the greatest deterrents. Barriers related to age (e.g., ageism) may also discourage older adults from embracing opportunities to participate in physical activity (Foos & Clark, 2016; Swift et al., 2017). However, the baby boomer generation has provoked social and demographic shifts (e.g., through social activism, consumerism, higher education levels,

family structure) which will continue to evolve ideologies related to age (Foos & Clark, 2016; Henchoz, 2019; Phillipson et al., 2008). As a result, this cohort has been positively impacting notions of aging and retirement. This has been further influenced by the significant size of their cohort, their own positive self-concepts about aging (e.g., '50 is the new 40'), and the fact they were socialized during the 1960s, a time of intense political activism (Foos & Clark, 2016; Hudson & Goneya, 2012; Phillipson et al., 2008; Pickard, 2019; van Dyk, 2018). Their anti-ageism approach challenges historical concepts of aging which are related to decline, while helping to make physical activity and sport participation more acceptable for older adults in western society (Gard et al., 2017; Leach, 2013; Pickard, 2019; van Dyk, 2018).

Sport, in particular, has the potential to provide a rich social setting for older adults to come together around a common interest to train and compete (Dionigi et al., 2011; Eman, 2012; Gard et al., 2017; Heo et al., 2013; Horton et al., 2018). Sport is described as a sociocultural phenomenon which connects people through physical activity with a goal to prepare and participate in organized competitions to obtain individual and socially significant results (Sutula, 2019). Historically, older adults have been underrepresented in sport compared to other age groups (e.g., youth), but there is evidence to suggest that sport participation is increasing for individuals 65 years of age and older, from 794,000 in 2018 to 1.13 million in 2021 (CFLRI, 2018; 2021). This represents growth of 339,000 participants in just four years and with an aging population, this number is expected to continue to grow significantly (CFLRI, 2018; 2021). Further impacting this growth in participation is an increase in the number of older adults experiencing healthy aging along with changing ideas about old age. This change in

perspective could be contributing to the increased popularity of sport participation later in life as healthier older adults look for ways to continue to participate in sport through their life course (Baker et al., 2010; Pickard, 2019; van Dyk, 2018; Zaidi et al., 2017).

Paralleling the growth in sport participation is the creation of new community, regional, national, and international sport organizations that provide resources (e.g., coaching, competitive events, facilities) to support the growing number of older athletes who like to compete (Cardenas et al., 2009; Deneau et al, 2020; Gard et al., 2017; Pfister, 2012). According to The Britannica Dictionary (2022), competition is described as "the act or process of trying to get or win something (such as a prize or a higher level of success) that someone else is also trying to get or win." Organizations who provide competitive events geared to older athletes (e.g., Ottawa Lions Athletics, Ontario Masters Athletics, National Senior Games Association) have seen growth in both participation numbers and results as older athletes have been steadily closing the gap in performance between young and old (e.g., age group improvements in overall running times; see Akkari et al., 2015; Jenkin et al., 2017; Jokl et al., 2004; Lepers & Cattagni, 2012; Lepers & Stapley, 2016; Stiefel et al., 2014). Older adults' ability to maintain competitive levels in both their training and performance might be due in part to an increase in resources, including more leisure time post retirement and greater access to coaching, specialized equipment, and facilities (Lepers & Stapley, 2016). Older adults have been a growing presence at large-scale sporting events like triathlons and marathons where more than 50% of male and 40% of female finishers are 40 years of age or older (Knechtle et al., 2012; Lepers & Cattagni, 2012; Lepers & Stapley, 2016). These organizations offer opportunities for older athletes to begin or continue to compete in

events previously thought to be exclusive to the young (Eman, 2012; Heazlewood et al., 2011; Webb et al., 2017).

There are many older adults who train for their sport and compete at a high level outside of a typical athletic retirement window (e.g., average retirement age is 30 years for most professional athletes; de Subijana et al., 2020; Tanaka, 2012; Webb et al., 2017).What older athletes have in common is their ability to successfully overcome constraints through the recognition, acceptance, and adaptation to their decline in physical abilities which may be responsible for fueling their determination to stay active (Benjamin et al., 2013; Dionigi et al., 2013). Many have adopted a proactive approach to long-term health and aging that includes actively participating in sport (Chang et al., 2014; Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Often referred to as masters athletes, these athletes train for and compete in events with other older adults in age groupings that help to keep it fair and competitive (e.g., typically starting at 30 years, age groups progress in five-year increments up to 100 years; Trappe, 2001). It is not uncommon for athletes to compete into their 70s and beyond (Gayman et al., 2017; Pfister, 2012; Trappe, 2001). Several studies on masters athletes have focused on the motivations and meaning behind participation in large-scale competitive events, like the World Masters Games, while others have reviewed the daily structure (e.g., training, coaching), including the physical and social history of sport participation, that leads up to these events (Adams et al., 2011; Callary et al., 2021; Dionigi et al., 2011; Heazlewood et al., 2011; Walsh et al., 2018a; 2018b; Young et al., 2015).

Competitive sport participation as a meaningful activity for the baby boomer generation, particularly as they go through the significant life transition of retirement, is

not well understood. Rowe and Kahn (1998) suggest engagement in meaningful activities can assist with healthy aging. This is further articulated by Carlson et al. (1998) who adds that meaningful activities are ones which facilitate creativity, provide a sense of competence, pleasure, and achievement. Menec (2003) suggests older adults who participate in social activities (e.g., games, church-related activities) feel they are an important component of successful aging. Retirement is often seen as a critical time that influences physical activity levels due to the changes experienced, including time flexibility, income levels, and social networks (Barnett et al., 2012). As such, retirement may provide a window for the promotion of sport among older retired adults (Barnett et al., 2012). With the ability of sport to provide meaning and social connection as athletes participate in a collective experience (Kelley et al., 2014), there is a need to understand how participation in sport may help to navigate the transition from working to retirement. Indeed, retirees who embrace the possibilities that less work-devoted time might present will understand that activities that once provided them with social relationships, meaning, and satisfaction in their career may be expressed in different forms through a renewed focus on current or new activities pursued post retirement (Wang & Shi, 2014). This is especially important as retirement may challenge one's identity as they move from a job or career to a new life as a retiree (Haslam et al., 2018). For retirees with good health, participating in organized sport opportunities has the potential to make retirement a time of increased growth, productivity, and personal development (Eman, 2012; Tkatch et al., 2017). While previous research suggests that retirees who pursue new opportunities are likely to enjoy a more successful transition through retirement (Eman, 2012; Wang et al.,

2014), research has yet to explore the role that competitive sport participation might have in this significant life transition.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the nature of competitive sport participation among baby boomers and its role in navigating life post retirement. Specifically, this study sought to understand the role of sport participation in facilitating social connections, health, and wellbeing among retirees. The following research questions were developed to guide the research process:

RQ1. What role does competitive sport participation play in the lives of retired baby boomers?

RQ2. How does participation in competitive sport assist aging baby boomers in navigating life post retirement?

RQ3. Why do aging baby boomers choose to participate in competitive sport?

Literature Review

Societal Conceptions of Aging

The baby boomer cohort is noteworthy both for its size and social characteristics which distinguish it from previous generations (e.g., higher education levels, lower rates of marriage, higher rates of separation and divorce, and fewer children; Golant, 2017; Hughs & O'Rand, 2005). This cohort has redefined each life stage as they have experienced it, with education, labour, and housing markets all adapting to their needs (Lin & Brown, 2012). Baby boomers grew up at a pivotal time in history which saw a cultural shift in gender roles where more women entered the workforce and pursued higher education (Hughs & O'Rand, 2005). As immigration policies changed, new Canadians helped to swell the numbers and diversify the baby boomer cohort leading to a generation more racially and ethnically diverse than their predecessors (Frey, 2010). This cohort of baby boomers have had an influence on education, music, race relations, sex roles, and child rearing (Manton, 2008). Statistically, this generation is healthier and have longer life expectancies than earlier generations (Gibaldi, 2014; Robinson et al., 2014). Although positive advances in medicine and nutrition have increased longevity and duration of healthy old age for this cohort, this demographic shift has not been without its challenges (Gibaldi, 2014; NIA, 2017; Robinson et al., 2014).

Improved public messaging (e.g., seat belt use, smoking cessation), and improved control of chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes; see McGregor et al., 2018; Taylor, 2014) have helped to save or extend lives, yet an aging population brings with it significant risk factors for age-related diseases (e.g., high blood pressure) which increase morbidity, mortality, and contribute to loss of autonomy (Benetos et al., 2019). As such, an aging

population will have an impact both socially and economically on world health care resources (NIA, 2017) which might explain why baby boomers have been almost vilified in contemporary discourses as a 'grey tsunami' (see Ryan et al., 2018). In response, there has been an increased interest in the study of aging by governments, corporate and non-profit businesses, and academics (Bristow, 2016; Cook, 2018; Radtke, 2016). This has been amplified by a desire to change the negativity reproduced through social norms (e.g., society is youth oriented) and stereotypes (e.g., old age is a time of dependency, decline) which have been historically associated with aging in western society (Bristow, 2016). Recent increases in life expectancy initiated by advances in medicine and nutrition have contributed to the need for perspectives of 'active aging' and 'successful aging' which challenge existing ideologies (Urtamo et al., 2019). Although success and aging might appear contradictory to the decline model historically associated with aging, changing views have evolved the concept of aging into a multifaceted phenomenon (McKee et al., 2015; Nosraty, 2016; Urtamo et al., 2019). Despite a multitude of studies at both the population level (e.g., determinants of health to influence policy; see Lee et al., 2020; Schiphorst et al., 2017) and the individual level (e.g., specific outcomes related to health, physical activity; see Parretti et al., 2017; Rowley at al., 2018), there is no consensus on how to best conceptualize aging. This has resulted in the emergence of several theoretical frameworks which help to understand the various ways that aging is understood.

Perspectives of Aging

Three commonly used perspectives of aging include biomedical (Rowe & Kahn, 1997; 1998), psychosocial (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), and postmodern biographical

(Chapman, 2005). The concept of aging is socially constructed so all of these perspectives are relevant. Each of these perspectives contribute to how social attitudes and behaviors inform the aging process.

The Biomedical Perspective of Aging

Early theorists relied on the biomedical perspective (Rowe & Kahn, 1997; 1998) which is characterized by operational measurements of health and functionality (e.g., cognition, see Lin et al., 2022; mobility, see Saboo et al., 2022). This perspective suggests that age-related declines are avoidable with proper risk reduction measures (e.g., nutrition) and that usual aging patterns (e.g., experiencing declines such as frailty) are considered failure (Davis, 2018). Although multiple studies (e.g., Chang et al., 2019; Michel et al., 2017; Tyrovolas et al., 2015) have adopted the biomedical perspective, using a biomedical gauge as a measure of success is discriminatory to many older adults because it only includes individuals who are free from disease or disability and who are actively engaged in their community (Rowe & Kahn, 1997; 1998). This also holds the individual primarily responsible for their quality of aging when many factors may be outside of their control (Martinson & Berridge, 2015). Carr and Weir (2017) argue that declines in physical and cognitive functioning are part of the aging process and may further be impacted by both genetics (largely uncontrollable) and lifestyle choices (largely controllable), including dietary habits (Kouvari et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2018) and physical activity (Gopinath et al., 2018; Spiteri et al., 2019). Absence of disease does not ensure successful aging nor does reduced functionality through disease or age-related limitations mean aging will be unsuccessful (Manierre et al., 2018; Martin & Gillen, 2014). As such, defining success in any age is both objective (e.g.,

functionality, free of disease) and subjective (e.g., life satisfaction, self-esteem, adaption to obstacles; Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Manierre et al., 2018; Martin & Gillen, 2014). It is important to note that success in older adulthood may take different forms than those in earlier life phases (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Over time, researchers have come to understand the value of a holistic view of aging which includes factors beyond the biophysical as important indicators of successful aging (Kim et al., 2021).

The Psychosocial Perspective of Aging

The psychosocial model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) is an alternate aging perspective that relies on subjective measurements related to one's health and wellbeing (e.g., social support, purpose, spirituality; see Jivraj et al., 2014; Steptoe et al., 2015). It is based on a model of 'selective optimization with compensation'. As age-related losses occur (e.g., mobility due to hip replacement), older adults compensate by adjusting their goals and then selecting the resources which will optimize their performance toward these newly established aims (e.g., physiotherapy and switching from running to cycling) (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; McKee et al., 2015). These adjustments demonstrate adaptability, a compensation which allows for a positive aging experience despite the losses (Baltes, 1993; 2003; Kooij, 2015). The ability to continually adapt is both a valuable life management skill and a determinant of success in aging (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes, 1993; Kooij, 2015). Carr and Weir (2017) apply this to several internal (e.g., choice, time, adaptation) and external (e.g., family role, finances) psychosocial factors and suggest there are three main criteria associated with successful aging. These criteria include health, engagement, and positive outlook. Further, they indicate that although many of their study participants alter their engagement based on health limitations,

engagement remains stable into older adulthood, suggesting an ability to adapt and compensate for functional losses leading to the self-perception of successful aging (Carr & Weir, 2017; 2019). Partington et al. (2005) examine aging as a state of mind and suggest that as people age, they come to accept or deny the aging process, both with possible health implications. Pandya and Halsall (2016) build on this concept and look at aging from the context of initiating ongoing life cycle changes, including a reduction in activity, social network, and anticipation of death, and dying.

Social networks have been investigated extensively as an important aspect of understanding aging from a psychosocial perspective (Castellano-Fuentes, 2014; Dykstra, 2015; Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011a; 2011b). Several studies support this holistic lens including Fiori and Jager (2012) who suggest that everyone has a social convoy (see also Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987), which moves with them through the life course. The convoy provides a reciprocal level of support which is dynamic and multidimensional and can affect health and wellbeing, suggesting a need to belong to multiple social networks as one ages (Fiori & Jager, 2012). Further, adjusting social networks may mitigate some of the losses associated with adaptations to life transitions including aging and retirement, although additional research is needed to further explore this concept (Fiori & Jager, 2012). Dykstra (2015) proposes that social support is a strong predictor of health and longevity among older adults. Research on the effects of social support on health and wellbeing demonstrates the importance of protecting networks into old age (Castellano-Fuentes, 2014; Dysktra, 2015; Santini et al., 2015). These networks are often at risk as individuals age, as they may not be able to maintain social connections due to reduced mobility, autonomy, and functionality. These social networks can be both

instrumental (e.g., join a friend to try a new hobby) and emotional (e.g., close friends and family express love and empathy) and demonstrate how important they are to wellbeing (Guma & Fernandez-Carro, 2021). Wider and more diverse social networks, such as those not exclusively composed of relatives, but also friends, colleagues, and/or neighbours, are associated with higher levels of happiness, confidence, and self-esteem (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011a). This is consistent with research that suggests contacts with close confidants favour a higher level of satisfaction and a positive impact on the psychosocial aspects of mental health and wellbeing (Castellano-Fuentes, 2014; Santini et al., 2015). This is particularly critical after significant loss (e.g., Kim et al., 2011; Monserud & Markides, 2016; Sullivan & Infurna, 2020). Several studies indicate the impact of various losses (e.g., loss of partner, family home, mobility) on the ability to maintain a social network which further contributes to mental health declines (Allen et al., 2014; Guma & Fernandez-Carro, 2021; Neimeyer & Thompson, 2014). From this perspective, aging is a dynamic, multi-dimensional life transition which is impacted by a combination of mental, emotional, and social factors.

The Postmodern Biographical Perspective of Aging

Many of the losses associated with aging impact the individual life story of older adults and, as such have been studied using the postmodern biographical perspective. This perspective recognizes the value of everyone's story in providing meaning through the aging process (Chapman, 2005). Malec-Rawinski (2021) sees the process of aging as an individual experience and argues that choice of coping strategies and resources will be unique to everyone. This life course approach promotes meaning making through the many life transitions which make up an individual's life story (Chapman, 2005). This

approach recognizes that life is a complex, multidimensional process offering no single pattern for success because everyone's experience is different (Malec-Rawinski, 2021). The biographical perspective has produced a sub-field called narrative gerontology, which suggests individual narratives are developed both from looking back and looking forward across the life course (Randall, 2013), and are embedded in an individual's unique experience and their own identity constructed by both current and previous life experience (Bron & Thunborg, 2017). This theoretical approach has been used to examine aging in different contexts (e.g., adult learning, see Alheit, 2018; older immigrants, see Malec-Rawinski, 2021). It offers a lens to understand the descriptive life story of participants as they reflect on the experiences that essentially make them who they are and highlight specific themes of power, pain, love, and happiness (Alheit, 2018). This approach promotes self-reflective aging which impacts the way an individual interacts with others in a social and cultural context (Alheit, 2018). This perspective views aging as a learning process where an individual's life is continually being constructed and reconstructed within several contexts (e.g., social, cultural, educational) which leads to a continual forming and transforming of identity (Malec-Rawinski, 2021). The definition of successful aging is then in the hands of the narrator, the one living the story who has the choice to frame and tell their story how they see fit, and the audience who will also play a role in their journey.

Each of the three aforementioned aging perspectives have been used separately and collectively to frame studies which contribute to a deeper understanding of the process of aging and may help us to better understand older adults' lived experiences with sport (Fernandez-Ballesteros, 2019). Recognizing the value in multiple perspectives,

The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) sought to further investigate the complexities of the aging process (Canadian Institute of Health Research [CIHR], 2021). The emerging insights help to unpack the multifaceted changes which occur during an individual's lifetime and how they might influence health and wellbeing in later years (CIHR, 2021). The CLSA articulates the ongoing need to further understand dynamics related to the aging process (CIHR, 2021; Friedman & Ryff, 2012). Drawing on this multifaceted approach, several organizations worldwide have worked to define aging with the intention that older adults might adopt a proactive approach to managing their long-term health, which may initiate a healthier aging experience. The United Nations established *A Decade of Healthy Ageing* (2021-2030) which is a global collaboration among governments, industry professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector with the goal to increase both knowledge and resources related to aging (Dixon, 2021). The World Health Organization's (WHO) *Global Age Friendly Cities: A Guide* introduces the term 'age-friendly' and identifies determinants that impact a healthy aging experience (WHO, 2007). Based on a life course approach to aging, age-friendly is a label which can be applied to cities that provide the physical and social supports necessary for a healthy aging experience (WHO, 2007). The WHO's *Framework for Healthy Aging* has influenced global aging policies and articulated many of the challenges and opportunities attributed to an aging population (WHO, 2018). The framework advocates for a holistic approach that suggests an emphasis on physical, mental, and social health (WHO, 2018; 2020). Recommendations include an increase in opportunities for the maintenance of physical activity and social participation through the lifespan (Foster & Walker, 2021; WHO, 2018; 2020; Zaidi et al., 2017). To facilitate

acceptance of these recommendations, there is a need for more positive attitudes around aging to ensure the needs of an aging population are prioritized (Boudiny, 2013; Narushima, 2016).

Aging Stereotypes

Historically, western society has viewed aging as a period of decline (Bristow, 2016; Radtke et al., 2016). The meaning that is attached to aging or being old is different around the world and, as such, is socially constructed within society (Mortimer & Moen, 2016). For example, because life expectancy varies from shorter in Central African Republic (54.36 years) to longer in Hong Kong (85.29 years), these two regions would likely have different ideas of what age is considered 'old' (Worldometers, 2017). Nonetheless, a common attachment to old age globally is 'ageism', a term that refers to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination based on age which is commonly directed toward older adults (Butler, 1969). Fueled by negative stereotypes, which may impact the way older adults perceive themselves and the way they are treated in society, ageism often results in lower self-esteem and self-efficacy (Lagacé et al., 2016). It is pervasive and evident in many institutions including health care, advertising and media, the legal and education systems, and recreation and leisure (Ayalon & Tesch-Romer, 2018; Chrisler et al., 2016; Doron, 2018; Koren, 2013; Massie & Meisner, 2019; Menkin et al., 2022; Phelan & Ayalon, 2020; Wyman et al., 2018). Ageism is reproduced in society through stereotypes which associate older adults with reduced physical and mental capacity, ill health, social isolation, incompetence, and dependency on others (Dionigi, 2015; Kotter-Gruhn & Hess, 2012; North & Fiske, 2012).

Aging stereotypes fail to recognize the diversity represented by older adults; treating them as a homogenous group may negatively impact participation in physical activity and other health seeking behaviour (Brothers et al., 2017; Chiviacowsky et al., 2018; Dionigi, 2015; Robertson et al., 2015). This negative influence may result in a desire to disengage from activities which may reaffirm negative stereotypes (Coudin & Alexopoulos, 2010; Dionigi, 2015; Horton et al., 2007). This phenomenon is referred to as a stereotype threat (Levy, 2001; Steele, 1997), and occurs when a situation triggers an age-related stereotype and alters behaviour due to fear of confirming the stereotype (Chiviacowsky et al., 2018). Scholars suggest that this may negatively impact older adults' cognition, including a reduced score on dementia testing (Haslam et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2022) and a reduced ability to learn a motor skill (Chiviacowsky et al., 2018). Chiviacowsky et al. (2018) observe that enhanced self-regulatory strategies (e.g., emotional control) help to buffer negative stereotypes in the short term, although behaviour may be impacted over time as self-regulatory strategies become less effective (Popham et al., 2015; Ståhl, et al., 2012). Further, older adults who do not follow the normal course of pathological aging and who may be considered more successful in their aging experience (e.g., older athletes) are even more impacted by stereotype threat (Chiviacowsky et al., 2018). This is largely due to the exhaustion that comes from the management and suppression of negative thoughts and feelings stemming from negative stereotypes that are often associated with sport and older adults (e.g., I am too slow, I am too old, I can't compete) (Chiviacowsky et al., 2018; Ståhl et al., 2012). This is an important consideration when studying sport and older adults as they may be dealing with this on an ongoing basis.

It is well supported that negative views on aging serve as a psychological barrier limiting self-perception of what is possible at a certain age and discouraging older adults from pursuing something they may feel they are too old to try (e.g., sports; Brothers et al., 2017; Chiviacowsky et al., 2018; Ståhl et al., 2012). Brothers et al. (2017) suggest that increasing positive views on aging may help to increase behaviours consistent with healthy aging (e.g., physical activity, healthy nutrition) which in turn are associated with increased wellbeing and life satisfaction (Klusmann et al., 2019; Nilsson et al., 2021). Sargent-Cox et al. (2012) finds that negative self-perceptions of aging are associated with poor health (e.g., poor physical functioning). The authors also indicate that individuals who maintain a more positive self-perception (as evidenced by a display of competence, self-worth, and self-esteem) increase their ability to cope with aging-related health declines (Sargent-Cox et al., 2012). This is consistent with Levy (2001) who suggests that self-perceptions (both implicit and conscious) are impacted by ageism.

Although the effects of stereotypes are changing, negative stereotypes are still being reinforced through discourse and imagery presented through mainstream and social media (Edstrom, 2018; Iversen & Wilinska, 2020; Levy et al., 2014; Vidovićová & Honelová, 2018). Media has the power to shape societal perceptions about aging and influence norms, roles, and behaviours by promoting images and discourse that devalue aging by associating it with loneliness, declining health, social problems, and dependence on others (Dionigi, 2015; Xu & Kottl, 2020). For example, advertising targeted to younger (typically age 65-75) older adults (e.g., for prescription drugs, retirement homes) associate aging with “the good life” with images depicting older adults who are happy, rich, and beautiful, with lives full of activity including travel and romantic relationships.

The advertising industry uses this to suggest everlasting youth (Loos & Ekström, 2014). These depictions of old age provide just one account of the aging process and may misrepresent the reality of what aging represents for many older adults. A study reviewing representations of older people on Facebook pages of organizations catering to older adults (e.g., retirement homes) found that many sites portray older adults as socially engaged and physically capable (Xu, 2020). While this helps to challenge negative stereotypes of aging, it also collides with the reality of care needs some older adults require (Xu, 2020). Most representations of this nature exclude individuals who no longer experience healthy aging (the older-old) and marginalizes both them and the aging process (Katz & Calasanti, 2015; Ylänne 2012). What is needed is a broader representation of aging that presents more of a heterogenous perspective.

Popular culture also plays a role in marginalizing older adults by forming and reforming social norms of aging. Valentova (2021) assessed comic books for their construction of age and found that a superhero's very essence is linked to strength, speed, and fighting capabilities, all associated with a youthful physique with no role for old, retired superheroes. Media profiles of older adults in the workplace often reinforce stereotypes of older workers which stem from both societal and organizational factors depicting older employees in contradictory terms as reliable yet unproductive (Bowen & Shirbekk, 2013; Kroon et al., 2016; 2018). These are reproduced in annual reports and employee newsletters, and often reflect the culture and values of an organization which sends a message that older employees hold no value (Kroon et al., 2018). Along with age, the media, popular culture, and the working environment are a point of reference for norms around gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation (Edstrom, 2018). When

age discrimination exists and intersects with other identities (e.g., intersectionality of gender, race, social class), the effects magnify societal behaviours, attitudes, policies, and practice (Potter et al., 2019). It is important to note that, although not everyone will be impacted by racism or sexism based on their race or sex being of the dominant group (e.g., White/Caucasian, male), all older adults are likely to be impacted by age discrimination at some point in their lives (Levy, 2001). Thus, there is a need to combat the detrimental effects of ageism through more positive representation in all aspects of society. This will help to ensure a better path forward for older adults (Leavy et al., 2011).

Physical Activity and Sport Participation Among Older Adults

Encouraged by studies that highlight the benefits of physical activity for an aging population, governments have developed supportive policy and legal frameworks to go alongside increased investment in physical activity opportunities for older adults (Daly et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2017). Research by the World Health Organization (2010) indicates physical inactivity as the fourth leading risk factor for mortality, emphasizing the importance of these investments. Higher levels of physical activity can offer protection against many non-communicable diseases (e.g., diabetes, certain cancers, cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases) and can help to offset aging-related decline in physical function (Daskalopoulou et al., 2017; Stockwell et al., 2019; Tak et al., 2013). Higher physical activity levels may also delay the need for health interventions, thereby improving participant health and reducing long term health-care costs (Kelley et al., 2014; Langhammer et al., 2018). Scholars warn of the risks of inactivity and highlight the physical health benefits associated with regular physical

activity (Biswas et al., 2015; Booth et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2013). Specifically, the physical benefits to older adults include lower stress levels (McHugh et al., 2012), improvements in sleep (Dzierzewski et al., 2014), decreased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke (Soares-Miranda et al., 2016), and decreased risk of cognitive decline (Sofi et al., 2011). With these associated benefits, it is not surprising that regular physical activity is also attributed to a reduced risk of mortality (Gebel et al., 2015; Hamer et al., 2014; Woodcock et al., 2011).

Common among an older population, frailty is diagnosed with the presence of three or more factors inclusive of weakness, unintentional weight loss, exhaustion, slow walking speed, and low physical activity levels (Fried et al., 2001). Watts et al. (2017) suggest that physical activity can play a key role in reducing or managing frailty in older adults. More specifically, sport clubs, due to reported increases in physical activity associated with sport club membership, play a role in preventing and managing frailty in older adults (Watts et al., 2017). Sport club membership is often influenced by the social benefits experienced as a result of being a member of a like-minded group with shared interests (Cardenas et al., 2009). Based on the individual, social, and community factors that influence participation, older adults prefer to engage in organized physical activities due to their ability to bring together people with common interests motivated by a need for social connection (Cardenas et al, 2009). Other studies note increased motivation to engage in physical activity due to the social connections derived from participation (Dionigi, 2006; Grant & Kluge, 2007; Hollmann et al., 2008). This is consistent with research that indicates the significant social outcomes related to physical activity in later life, mainly the social relationships that can form through participation in sport (Baker et

al., 2010; Dionigi, 2006; Reed & Cox, 2007). There are also reported improvements in mental health (e.g., happiness; Lara et al., 2020) and cognition (e.g., memory; Kraft, 2012; Bherer et al., 2013). Regular physical activity is also known to positively impact autonomy and subjective health and wellbeing (Parra-Rizo et al., 2021).

Yet, despite the known benefits associated with regular physical activity, only 37% of older adults aged 65 years and older meet the minimum guidelines for physical activity of 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly (Boulton, 2018; CFLRI, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2021). Recent evidence suggests that this may be due to perceptions that 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week is an unrealistic goal for most older adults and a focus on reducing inactivity might be more appropriate (Biswas et al., 2015; Ekelund et al., 2020; Gebel et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2020; Heesch et al., 2012; Hupin et al., 2015; McCracken & Dogra, 2016; Varma et al., 2014; 2017). In response to this, the World Health Organization recently modified their messaging on physical activity for older adults to improve the likelihood of adoption of their recommendations. The new guidelines have perhaps lowered the bar and suggest that older adults aged 65 years and older focus more on limiting sedentary time and replacing it with physical activity of any intensity (CSEP, 2021; WHO, 2020; 2021).

Although overall physical activity participation among older Canadians is low, one type of physical activity that is growing among older adults is sport (Doyon et al., 2021). Despite being greatly underrepresented in sport compared to other age groups (e.g., youth), there is evidence to suggest that sport participation is increasing in the 65+ years age group, from 12.5% in 2018 to 16% in 2021 (CFLRI, 2018; CFLRI; 2021). Changing ideas about aging (e.g., time of growth rather than of decline) could be

contributing to the increased popularity of sport participation later in life as older adults look for ways to continue to participate in sport through their life course (Baker et al., 2010; Pickard, 2019; van Dyk, 2014; Zaidi et al., 2017). As sport participation rates have increased for older adults, scholars have sought to understand its role in health and wellbeing. Dionigi (2016) discusses the meaning derived from, and the sociological and psychosocial issues related to, participation in sport by older adults, arguing that western ideology about the aging body has changed to the point "where agency and effort are always expected" (p. 56), creating an assumption that older adults need to actively participate in sport to age successfully. These ideas do not consider individuals who experience barriers (e.g., race, economic, physical) to participation in organized sport which often limits sport participation to older adults who are more privileged (i.e., mainly White, and middle class) and may set an unrealistic standard for those who cannot participate (Dionigi, 2016; Gillierd et al., 2013).

As sport is becoming more accepted and valued across the lifespan, it is often included in health promotion policies and practice to encourage older adults to remain active (Dionigi, 2016). Since the 1960s there has been an increase in the number and variety of sport opportunities available for older adults, despite youth sport remaining a priority for most community sport organizations with youth programming receiving most of the resources (e.g., funding, equipment, facilities; Jenkin et al., 2017). This may be changing as witnessed by the rise in popularity of and active engagement with pickleball, a sport with ties to tennis but with a paddle instead of a racket and a harder ball. Pickleball is now one of the fastest growing sports in the United States and Canada, particularly among older adults (Crumpler, 2015; Heo et al., 2018). It is an emerging

form of ‘serious leisure’ (when leisure takes priority and develops into an influential aspect of a participant’s social world; see Stebbins, 2015). At the 2017 USA National Senior Games, pickleball was considered one of the most popular sports based on the number of participants (Heo et al., 2018; Walsh, 2017). This may be due to the social networks and daily structure that competition in pickleball encourages which improves life satisfaction and encourages a happier aging experience among older adult participants (Chen, 2021; Heo et al., 2018). This is consistent with the benefits of other masters sports among older athletes (e.g., Dionigi et al., 2011; Eman, 2012; Gard et al., 2017; Horton et al., 2018).

Masters athletes are often the subject of studies because they may provide an example of the possibility of healthy human aging, especially in relation to accomplishments related to functionality and physical activity (Coakley, 2015; Dionigi, 2011; Eman, 2012; Gard et al., 2017; Horton et al., 2018; Senefeld & Hunter, 2019). Henderson et al. (2012) reviewed the motivations and benefits perceived by athletes attending the North Carolina Seniors Games in 2011 and found that participation in the games motivated participants to be more physically and socially active through derived benefits, which included an opportunity for social engagement and improved health. Geard et al. (2017) suggest that masters sport is an ideal facilitator of healthy aging as participants often display above average physical function compared to their peers who are less active. In another study, criteria of high physical, psychological, cognitive, and social functioning are used to measure success in a group of masters swimmers who push themselves to a higher level of physical fitness than most non-participants (Geard et al., 2018). These and other studies which associate successful aging with masters sport

participation demonstrate similar results (e.g., Louis et al., 2012), largely due to the regularity and intensity of the physical training which puts them into an extremely fit older adult sub-cohort. Along with the physical benefits, participants also cite social (e.g., making new friends) and psychological (i.e., stress relief) benefits, and the excitement and joy of competition which accompanies competing at a high level as important motivators to participate (Deneau et al., 2020; Dionigi, 2016; Horton et al., 2019; Jenkin et al., 2017).

Promoting sport participation for older adults may increase the possibility of a positive aging experience for participants and points to the important role of continued physical activity in navigating the aging process (Geard et al., 2021). Naderyan et al. (2019) uses a continuity theory perspective to uncover whether patterns of physical activity are present across one's life course. The study reveals a continuity in activity patterns (in the case of this study - walking) suggesting physical activity in later life may be a continuation of physical activity in earlier life. The authors suggest a need for better interventions to promote participation at younger ages to ensure participation is established and will continue into old age (Naderyan et al., 2019). The authors also indicate that physical activity decreases with age and that it is tied to education levels (Naderyan et al., 2019).

Baby Boomers and Retirement

There are currently 9.2 million baby boomers in Canada of which 4.5 million are no longer in the workforce (Statistics Canada, 2022). The impact this segment of the population has, and will continue to have, on economic and health care systems in Canada as they move into retirement has garnered much attention from scholars across

several disciplines (e.g., Bragg & Hansen, 2015; Canizares et al., 2016; Gill & Cameron, 2022; Myers et al., 2013; Plawecki & Plawecki, 2015). Retirement is viewed as a major life event which involves a transition in social roles and societal expectations offering both opportunities and challenges (Ekerdt, 2010; Hansson et al., 2017). Henkens (2018) suggests that younger baby boomers have a different approach to retirement than earlier generations. As such, more recent ideas of retirement are moving away from associating advanced years with inevitable disability and poverty to one of entering a new phase of life supported by increasing longevity and health status which may encourage growth, freedom, and exploration (Hardy, 2011; Sargent-Cox et al., 2012). This push for personal development has created a demand for bridge employment (a recent trend in post-retirement employment), which is embraced by many older adults who like working. Pleau and Shauman (2012) investigate the concept of bridge employment and suggest that its popularity may be driven by an attempt by older adults to maintain continuity in their lives. A more gradual shift to full retirement is a coping mechanism for ending a career and often an attempt to replace the diminished social status experienced due to the loss of social relationships and physical environment that can be absent in retirement (Pleau & Shauman, 2012; Zhang & Zhang, 2015).

Loureiro et al. (2015) position retirement as a life transition that can impact the aging process, as retirement is often seen as the start of old age. Retirement is full of major changes to personal resources including income levels, available free time, and social networks (Ekerdt, 2010; Wang et al., 2010). Each of these have the capability of impacting physical activity levels at what has been depicted as a critical time for influencing health-related behaviours into old age (Barbosa et al., 2016). Godfrey et al.

(2014) conclude that retirement has a positive effect on physical activity levels, and they suggest this is due in part to older retired adults spending less time sedentary than those who are working and a similar age. The authors also confirm that, although many would be receptive to more physical activity due to more leisure time and a desire for activities, most older adults in the study did not meet minimum physical activity requirements, suggesting a need for physical activity options specifically targeting older retired adults (Godfrey et al., 2014). Retirement is often seen as a critical time that influences physical activity and that may provide a window for the promotion of sport (Barnett, 2012). It is also a time where there is a potential for voluntary disengagement from lifelong social roles as articulated by disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961). The theory postulates that the act of retirement is functional and beneficial for society and involves retirees moving from wage earner to another identity as they lose both social status and their peer group (Cumming & Henry, 1961). To avoid disengagement, these losses (e.g., daily structure, social network) must be replaced with activities which provide similar benefits to assist older adults in remaining active, which is essential to fostering health and wellbeing (Fox et al., 2017). Although there are several studies on the life transition of retirement, there is a lack of research specifically on the role of sport in the lives of retired baby boomers. All of this points to a need for more research on the topic of aging, sport, and retirement and how continuity may be maintained through sport participation.

Theoretical Approach

The literature revealed there are several layers related to aging and so this study was guided by a multi-dimensional understanding of the aging process which provided a basis for investigating aging and the life transition of retirement (Crosswell et al., 2020;

Lahdenperä et al., 2022; Steptoe et al., 2013). Specifically, continuity theory (Atchley 1989; 1993; 1999) was used as the theoretical approach for this study as a lens to understand human adaptation to individual experiences of aging. Building on activity theory (Havighurst, 1961), which suggests that change brings a need to find equilibrium, Atchley (1989) argues continuity theory be used as a lens to understand how individuals adapt, grow, and change based on their past experiences. While activity theory is based on a homeostatic model which does not adapt as changes occur, continuity theory recognizes this is impossible as a person's aging constantly evolves, suggesting the need for a more fluid model (Atchley, 1989). As individuals age, they draw on past experiences to apply strategies that have previously worked to adapt to changes associated with aging. This allows older adults the ability to maintain both internal (e.g., experience, skills, preferences) and external (e.g., activities, physical, and social environments) structures which, along with experiences in handling change, influences decisions on how to adapt to the new changes continually emerging through the lifecycle (Atchley, 1989). This suggests a process of selective investment, whereby an individual prioritizes their time and effort towards activities, people, and environments that have a positive impact on their lives (Atchley, 1993). There are clear domains that emerge as priorities throughout an individual's life course including those related to work, community, and recreational pursuits. Similarly, the model of selective optimization with compensation is based on the premise that age-related losses will occur (e.g., job, spouse, mobility) and older adults find ways to compensate for these losses as they age (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Decisions on how to do this are then based on a combination of an individual's past, and their perceptions about the reality of their present; decisions are

further influenced by internal and external factors, allowing the individual to ultimately decide how to adapt to the changes they are faced with as they transition through life (Atchley, 1989).

Retirement is characterized by a permanent withdrawal from the workforce and a transition into a new phase in life, thus a certain level of adjustment is expected. Being able to adapt is essential for maintaining or improving wellbeing throughout the retirement transition (Cooper et al., 2017). Continuity theory identifies adaptation as key to maintaining patterns of thought, activities, and habits as a strategy for navigating life transitions including retirement (Atchley, 1989; 1993; 1999*).* Predicated on the use of schemas developed over years of feedback and experience, continuity then allows adults to make decisions which help them to successfully adjust to changes throughout life. Specific to retirement, Moen (1996) suggested that a loss of roles, social integration, and daily structure, all once provided by a job or career, may be key contributors to diminished health and wellbeing in retirement. These losses may be offset by taking on new roles and pursuing new sources of social integration (e.g., adjusting/adapting) (McClelland, 1985; Moen, 1996). Individuals may adapt to age-related changes by maintaining consistency in their lives, and health and wellbeing later in life can be developed or enhanced through the seeking of new activities and social networks in the absence of previous sources (Atchley, 1989). Several studies confirm that retirees who find balance and adapt their daily structure to their newly found free time, are better able to overcome most transition challenges and have a positive retirement experience (Genoe et al., 2018; Wang & Shultz, 2010; Wang et al., 2014). Thus, continuity theory offers an

appropriate lens to investigate how sport participation might facilitate the replacement of daily structure and social networks lost at the end of a career.

Methodology

Research Design

Much of the previous research involving older adults has utilized quantitative approaches that rely on biomedical and psychosocial perspectives of physical activity on aging (e.g., Horton et al., 2013; Horton et al., 2019; Louis et al., 2012). This type of research does not always acknowledge the change and impermanence that is part of the human experience, which is often displayed in opinions derived from rich individual narratives (Chowdhury, 2019). As such, from a constructivist ontological position, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to frame my study (Chowdhury, 2019; Smith 1996; 2011; Smith et al., 2009). This was done with the understanding that reality can be perceived in multiple ways and that subjectivity and personal perspective is of critical importance. I used semi-structured interviews to encourage the telling of the individual experience and to capture ideographic descriptions, personal beliefs, and meanings of the role of sport in the lives of the participants (Adams, 2015; DeJonckheere, 2019; Maxwell 2012; 2019). Interviews have the ability to frame topics that have complexity and may evoke emotions, which is possible when discussing major life transitions like retirement and aging (Kvale, 2006). Interviewing participants helped to illuminate the complexity of competitive sport participation and how it might impact retirement and ensured it was grounded in human experience (Chowdhury, 2019). The exploratory nature of this approach contributed to an understanding of the ever-changing dynamics of sport participation and how the related social relationships, daily habits, and behaviours contribute to the retirement transition for baby boomers (Chowdhury, 2019). A systematic approach, along with clear articulation of any preconceived judgements or

ideological leanings, was used to help navigate researcher bias. To ensure trustworthiness (Smith & McGannon, 2018), a number of strategies were implemented including the use of thick description (observable in the participant quotes) and the added step of member reflections (Giffin et al., 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018). This study also utilized critical friends (Cowan & Taylor, 2016), and an audit trail including a reflexive journal (Carcary, 2009), contributing to the rigour and transparency of the findings.

Researcher Positionality

Husserl (1970; 1999) suggests that in IPA the researcher's activities begin with experience and end in interpretation, all the while ensuring that the participant remains front and centre in the study. In a dialogical study, the researcher is also one of the participants, so it is important to understand the assumptions and perspectives that I may bring to the research process (Holmes, 2020). I was raised in a traditional family (e.g., married mother and father), as the eldest of three children, and identify as female so my lived experiences come from this perspective. My ancestry is Metis (French and Algonquin), but I was raised in a small town in Northern Ontario in a predominantly White suburb and as such I have the privilege that accompanies this upbringing, including access to recreational facilities (e.g., YMCA, running tracks, playgrounds) at a young age. As a child I was involved in non-organized sport but due to my family's socioeconomic status at the time, did not start participating in organized sport until high school. I had a passion for running and would challenge neighbourhood children to foot or bike races and loved watching world track and field championships and the Olympics. I had resourcefulness and found ways to buy sport equipment and pay fees for races and tournaments. My parents had little involvement in my desire to pursue sport. I self-

propelled into high school track and field, cross country running, Nordic skiing, and volleyball. I had a deep need to push myself in sport so may not fully relate to someone who does not share this passion. I feel that everyone should have sport in their lives because it taught me the meaning of self-discipline, commitment, goal setting, teamwork and how to push through pain to train and compete. I had the privilege to play varsity basketball and softball during a year at a small liberal arts college in Texas, U.S. Unfortunately, I had to leave due to ill health which took me out of sport for over a year. This was one of the biggest challenges I had as a young adult. There was a deep void caused by lack of participation and I struggled with diminished mental health during that time.

Currently, I am considered a masters athlete by age, and will excitedly tell anyone who asks about the value of sport as an older adult. I feel lucky to have the health and physical ability to continue to compete and feel the frustration and sacrifice along with the joy and excitement that come with competing at a high level. I have competed in javelin, discus, and shotput, winning medals at both provincial and national masters-level competitions. I have also competed in international long-drive competitions where I won my age category at women's worlds in 2018. I have competed in more than 30 road races (running) from 5km to half marathon distance. All of these endeavours have cost time and money and so I understand the resources needed to participate as an older athlete. In 2017, I returned to finish a post-secondary education as a mature student where I competed on the women's varsity golf team. I did not participate in golf regularly until well into my 40s and so an assumption I bring to this study is that, although it might

appear to be difficult, a person can learn and excel in a new sport as an older adult as long as they have access to resources (e.g., facilities, finances, coaching).

Along with my own athletic endeavours, my three adult sons were also actively involved in school and club (basketball, baseball, rugby, and football) and post-secondary (basketball) sports. This experience with intergenerational sport may give me a glimpse into the lives of my participants. It may also give me a better understanding of the influence of family values on a life-long commitment to sport. I coached basketball for more than 15 years for club teams, at camps, and for Ontario and Canada Basketball talent identification programs, including the 2010 Ontario Summer Games where my team won a silver medal. I also worked with Olympic coaches in developing off-ice programming to support competitive figure skaters. I am currently an NCCP and PGA certified community golf coach at a local golf club where I teach young female golfers. I bring that assumption that coaching may positively or negatively impact youth sporting experiences which may help to facilitate either a lifelong love of sport or lead to disengagement. Sport has and continues to be a significant factor in my life. It has been an outlet to manage the stress associated with raising a family and has provided me with a large social network of friends. It has been the one constant in my life which has provided joy from childhood to the present day. Sport continues to play a strong role in my life with time built into each day to train for and participate in amateur golf events, masters basketball tournaments, and cycling adventures. Throughout my life, much of my physical activity, social engagement, and travel has been derived from participation in sport.

Participants and Procedures

In line with IPA, principal criteria for participant eligibility (Edwards & Skinner, 2010) was utilized to generate a sample group who: (a) are retired from full-time employment/caregiving/homemaking, (b) have a birthdate inclusive of 1946 to 1965, (c) participate in organized competitive sport (e.g., practice/train for their sport at least once per week (apart from injuries) and compete in a competition at least once per season), (d) speak English, e) had the means to participate in a virtual interview, and were willing to discuss their experiences with sport. The study was open to anyone meeting the above noted criteria irrespective of gender (e.g., male, female, non-binary individuals), race, ethnicity, geography, or educational levels. It was open to anyone including individuals experiencing age-related impairments, injury, disease, and/or disability.

Participants were recruited using purposeful non-probability sampling, seeking participants believed to be well informed about the topic and able to provide insights into the research question (Creswell, 2013). Calls were made to multiple sport organizations to seek out a diverse group of athletes (specifically asking to include ethnically diverse athletes), in keeping with the inclusion criteria. Key contacts (e.g., volunteer board of director and/or athletes) in these organizations passed along study information to other athletes they either competed with or had met through competition who in turn contacted me with an interest to participate. Snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013) was also used to identify cases of interest once the initial contact with the sport organizations was completed, and the first round of sampling was exhausted. Participants who were interviewed for the study provided study information to others they believed would be

interested in participating. This strategy generated additional participants who met the inclusion criteria and were able to provide in-depth understanding on the study topic.

To avoid the possibility of coercion, I reminded all interested participants about the voluntary nature of their participation. Once prospective participants' eligibility was confirmed, they were sent a short email of introduction with an attached information sheet (see Appendix A) and participant consent form (see Appendix B). The information sheet and consent form outlined the expectations of participants and expected risks and benefits. Participants were reassured that participation was voluntary, were provided an explanation of how privacy will be protected and were reminded that the consent form included permission to record the interview. Upon signing the consent form, an interview was scheduled with participants at a time that was convenient for them. With the Covid-19 pandemic still evolving, there was a need for caution in personal contact, particularly for vulnerable populations (e.g., older adults). Thus, participants were offered to complete the interview via virtual platform (e.g., Teams, Zoom) or via telephone.

The interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see Appendix C) to ensure that key issues were discussed with all participants but allowing for flexibility to explore new issues that emerged during the discussion. To create an atmosphere in which the participant felt comfortable, care was taken (e.g., kept a friendly, open demeanour) to ensure the flow of the interview came from the participant. Thirteen participants volunteered to be interviewed for this study and included eight men and five women ranging in age from 59 to 75 years (mean age 65). Interviews took place in the months of June and July 2022, via a pre-selected video conference platform and lasted between 40 to 60 minutes with one interview lasting close to 120 minutes. Although distributing

study information to contacts from a variety of different sports (e.g., basketball, cycling, track and field) was done to encourage a diversity in participants, all participants were Caucasian, well-educated, middle-class adults. This is consistent with the demographic which currently dominate masters sports and not unlike the participant base from previous studies (see Brilliant et al., 2021; Dionigi et al., 2012). Although the population of Canadian older adults is growing more diverse, there is still a relatively small number of older Canadians who identify with an ethnic or cultural background other than White/Caucasian. Currently, 85.7% of the population over age 65 identify as White/Caucasian (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020), which may have contributed to my participant sample. All of the participants were retired from their regular full-time careers although several held occasional or part-time seasonal jobs or volunteered on a regular basis. All participated regularly in at least one sport involving regular competition and represented a variety of both individual and team, and winter and summer sports.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Sport(s) Played	Age	Gender	Education	Location
1	Track & Field	69	F	Bachelor's Degree	Ontario
2	Basketball	60	M	Master's Degree	Ontario
3	Cycling, Volleyball	67	M	Bachelor's Degree	Manitoba
4	Road Running	62	F	College Diploma	Ontario
5	Road Running, Hockey, Pickleball, Softball	63	M	College Diploma	Ontario
6	Track & Field, Hockey	59	F	Bachelor's Degree	Ontario
7	Tennis	64	M	Master's Degree	Ontario
8	Road Running	75	M	Bachelor's Degree	Ontario
9	Golf	64	M	Master's Degree	Ontario
10	Track & Field, Trail Running	67	M	Master's Degree	Ontario
11	Nordic Skiing	62	F	Secondary Diploma	Alberta
12	Nordic Skiing	69	M	Master's Degree	Alberta
13	Track & Field	65	F	Master's Degree	Ontario

Once each interview was completed, participants were thanked for their time and encouraged to reach out if they had any additional questions regarding the study.

Data Collection

Ethics clearance was granted by the Research Ethics Board (REB) from the University of Windsor. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) was used to direct questions to ensure consistency yet allow for flexibility to probe for deeper understanding of the participant perspective (Adams, 2015). Initially, once the consent form was signed, scanned, and emailed back to me, participants were asked demographic questions which helped to provide context for the study. Participants were then asked questions related to specific areas of inquiry including those relating to the history of

their competitive sport participation through their life course, key facilitators to staying involved in competitive sports, the benefits (physical, mental, social) that are obtained through competitive sport participation, the challenge(s) to competitive sport participation and how they may have evolved with age, how sport participation might be important in helping them navigate retirement, and perspectives of their competitive sport participation and how it might impact their perceptions of aging. Along with a better understanding of continuity in sport participation and how it might impact aging and the transition to retirement, the interviews assisted in providing overall perspectives on aging, the aging process, adapting to varying levels of functionality due to age-related losses, and the meaning of sport participation through the life course.

Audio recording of all interviews occurred using either a digital recorder or the recording tool on the videoconferencing platform. To provide a rich, detailed account of the data, interviews were transcribed verbatim. Trustworthiness was enhanced through the process of member reflections. This process provided an opportunity to investigate any contradiction and differences in knowing between the participants and the researcher (Smith & McGannon, 2018). As such, each participant was given an opportunity to review their interview transcript and engage in a discussion with me to generate further data and insight. Of the 13 participants, three responded back to provide further insights or clarifications. This helped to identify any gaps in the data along with differences in knowing which were explored and reframed. Both complementary and contradictory results were included in the discussion to ensure the research results were robust (Giffin et al., 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018). Data collection was concurrent with data analysis which provided early recognition of emerging themes allowing data collection to

continue until no new themes or insights emerged (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Urquhart, 2013).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as a foundation to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes found in the data (Adams, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Specifically, Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step framework provided structure for reflective thematic analysis as it is flexible and useful in the examination of different perspectives, providing a framework for highlighting both similarities and differences and generating novel insights. First, the transcripts were read carefully to ensure familiarity with the data (dataset familiarization). Notes were documented and stored from first impressions. Second, initial codes were generated by systematically organizing the data (data coding) using an excel spreadsheet and organizing quotes into codes which emerged from reading the data. Third, themes that describe patterns in the data relevant to the research questions were generated (initial theme generation). Fourth, themes were reviewed, modified, and developed for further analysis (theme development and review). In this step, use of 'critical friends' (Cowan & Taylor, 2016) helped to ensure that reflexivity was encouraged whereby I interpreted the findings and listened to critical feedback which challenged some of the construction of the knowledge found in the data (Cowan & Taylor, 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2018). The role of critical friends was assumed by my co-advisors on this study, namely Dr. Sean Horton and Dr. Patti Millar. Fifth, themes were studied to understand the essence of each theme and to identify any emerging sub-themes and how they might interact with the main themes (theme refining, defining, and naming). This resulted in the emergence of key themes which were

common across age, gender, and sport. Last, the writing step, ensured the data informed the results and was included in the thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This structure allowed for flexibility and went beyond just summarizing to provide an interpretation of the underlying conceptions, assumptions, and ideologies which are underpinning the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

With the understanding that thematic analysis is a fluid, iterative, and reflective process which develops over time, the process required a back and forth between the phases. This assisted in capturing the multiple realities and rich narratives that are present in participants' viewpoints (Braun & Clarke, 2021). An audit trail was established by keeping records of the raw data in the form of recorded and transcribed interviews along with a reflective journal to provide additional means to systemize, relate, and cross reference data (Carcary, 2009). All data is stored on the University of Windsor's encrypted servers, using a password protected profile.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of sport participation among baby boomers and its role in navigating life post retirement. Specifically, this study sought to understand the role of sport in facilitating social connections, daily structure, and behaviours which may contribute to health and wellbeing in retirement. This chapter presents the themes generated from the data: (1) Sport as a tool in the transition to retirement; (2) Importance of sport-for-life; and (3) Opportunities for meaningful competition.

Sport as a tool in the transition to retirement

According to the data, a successful transition to retirement was associated with robust social networks which fostered a sense of belonging, along with stable or improved mental and physical health and wellbeing. The data supported the value of sport as a tool in this capacity and suggested that participants felt they were successfully navigating this significant life transition. Participants shared that sport was a regular activity in their lives that was established prior to retiring. This allowed them to build a solid social network outside of work which continued into retirement. Their daily habits and behaviours revolved around maintaining this sport participation following retirement. The increased availability of time since retiring was viewed as an opportunity to more fully engage in sport which assisted in maintaining or improving their health and wellbeing. The role of sport in the transition to retirement is framed around three sub-themes: (1) Sport participation compensated for work-related losses; (2) Sport provided a supportive social network for retirees; and (3) A renewed focus on sport improved health and wellbeing during retirement.

Sport participation compensated for work-related losses

Participants discussed several losses that they associated with the end of their career/job or family caregiver duties, including the loss of daily structure, goal setting, and planning that was a key part of their lives while working. Participants also spoke of the loss of a stimulating work-related social network which provided opportunities for daily interactions that resulted in camaraderie and collective problem solving. Despite experiencing these losses since retiring, participants felt that sport served to compensate for those losses by providing an outlet that introduced many of the same challenges and opportunities. Participant 2 expressed how he missed the intellectual challenge derived from his job. He felt that participating in sport was a challenge that provided an opportunity to develop mental toughness which helped him to fill this void. As such, sport provided an avenue for personal achievement previously experienced in his work environment:

> Mentally, it gives you something to look forward to. Especially, when you're retired, and you've left, for me at least, a pretty demanding job that had a lot of demands for time. I don't miss that, but ... I do miss the intellectual challenge. And I think [participating in sports] can give you as much as anything, ... I've got to prepare mentally a little bit for ... basketball or going to the gym and saying, okay, how am I going to get through [the training and competing]. I absolutely believe that ... it's something to look forward to, something to kind of try to aspire to do better at, to improve to a degree and so that has filled some of that void as well.

Similarly, Participant 5 explained how sport replaced some of the competition and tracking of performance associated with a job:

> My job, because it was competitive ... everything [was] based on numbers, and performance and you could track your performance, you could track your numbers. So, when you're working, you get paid for doing that. Sports to me were the exact same thing.

Other participants shared how participating in sport provided some routine in their lives following the loss of work-related schedules and commitments. Participant 9 noted that his routine rounds of golf became a daily habit, helping to fill his day now that he had more free time not taken up with work. “It fills a good part of my routine. You’ve got the whole day. I'm by myself so it takes out a good chunk of your day that you don't have to worry about trying to plan something.” To fill this void in the off season his daily habit switched to participating in physical activity at a fitness club which allowed him to maintain both his daily schedule and his fitness level for another season of golf. He lived by himself, which is common among older adults, and sport offered a daily activity that provided both a routine and an opportunity to socialize with other people. Participant 1 indicated that she liked how sport participation (training and competing) provided her with an opportunity to set goals and establish a new routine:

> What’s lovely about retirement, you can make a new routine that is your own ... you need a routine, and it (sport) fills your social needs and your need for routine, having goals ... where you had that as a working person, sport does this.

Another participant discussed the logistics of the sporting events she participated in which included travel, and an opportunity to socialize with food and entertainment,

something that was often experienced in a working environment. Including these opportunities in events geared toward older athletes made the event something to look forward to and replaced similar work-related experiences since retiring. These events became an important component for fulfillment in retirement for some of the older adults interviewed:

> You have a little picnic afterwards, and you are going to have a good time. And a lot of times you have entertainment and things like that. So, it's a whole social event. It's not just the running the race, and then you go home (Participant 10).

What these data articulate is that the working environment provided several resources that participants found important to their overall happiness (e.g., intellectual demand, performance evaluation, social network). As their work-generated resource pool declined upon retirement, similar resources generated through sport participation grew to replace them. As these losses were replaced through sport, they provided structure and stability in the lives of the participants which contributed to their retirement wellbeing.

Sport provided a supportive social network for retirees

Participants described a successful transition to retirement as one associated with robust social networks including a sense of belonging which helped to provide stable or improved mental and physical health and wellbeing. Participants shared how sport participation played a vital role in their development of social capital by providing an opportunity to come together to train or compete allowing them to extend their current friendships and social networks and the resources that are associated with these (e.g., emotional support, encouragement, advice). Participants expressed that a strong social network in retirement was often challenging because the social aspects of a career are no

longer present (e.g., daily interactions with coworkers and other work-related relationships). Participant 5 explained:

> Most days, I dealt with customers all the time. But somebody working at an office building, ... they're in touch with people every day. And now suddenly, that's gone. I think that'd be a challenge for a lot of people. That's a big loss that people experience ... their social network after retiring.

Participants spoke about how isolating retirement can be without the daily interactions and socialization with work colleagues. Participant 10 suggested that once you retire "there's a little bit of isolation, you get a little lonely every once in a while. There were a number of people at work that I enjoyed interacting and socializing with, so I miss that aspect of it." Participant 2 suggested that it was not just the colleagues he missed, but the extended network made through a career where there was regular collaboration with teammates. He enjoyed the collective mindpower of coming up with solutions to issues along with the camaraderie of the group dynamics and has been challenged not having this in his day-to-day schedule:

> I miss the people that we collaborated with ... usually it was a team ... we sometimes used outside groups to come up with the solution and implement it. And a lot of those people were very smart and had great insight and were fun to be around. So [missing this interaction] that would be one of the challenges that I've had on a day-to-day basis.

Although sport provided physical benefits, Participant 11 considered the social benefits equally as important as participation provided an opportunity to both meet and develop

relationships with people who enjoyed similar activities and lifestyles. Being with like-minded older adults was an important benefit identified by several participants:

> I think that's an important aspect of going out and doing sports with other people ... I would maybe say it is almost as important as the physical aspect ... especially ... as we get older it can be very isolating. And you meet like-minded people ... I think that's really important.

Retirees who were well connected through sport clubs found these memberships to be even more valuable after retirement as work-related group settings diminished. These clubs provided an opportunity to access and grow social support. Some of the opportunities to connect socially came through participation in the sport club's training sessions, along with attending their related sporting events, mainly competitions:

> There's a social aspect of it as well. And even running, I mean, people can join walking clubs, running clubs, go to events where you get to meet lots of people. I think the social aspect is really important (Participant 5).

Several participants discussed the long-term friendships that were made through sport participation which continued into their retirement. These relationships came as a result of their participation in events and through being part of a club earlier in their life while they were still working. There was evidence of many friendships lasting a lifetime which became even more important after retiring. Having more free time allowed them to focus on their sport and further develop these relationships. Sport thereby encouraged continuity in friendships. and provided an ongoing opportunity to meet new people:

> You know, the people that I meet at the races, obviously, we see each other a lot when we're racing, so they became friends of mine, the people in my track club.

> I've had the same coach since 1983. He's 96 years old and a lifelong friend as well. And a few guys that I ran with in the 70s and 80s I still keep in touch with but also a lot of new friends in the masters competitions that you meet up with, and you hang around with them as well (Participant 10).

Participant 1 indicated that most of her friends were ones she has made either through her sport of track and field or through the many cross training activities she engaged in to stay in shape for her sport (e.g., group fitness). She continued to participate in non-competitive activities (e.g., walking) with friends who were no longer competing, confirming they were still among her friend group. She did not experience a decrease in social support since retiring due to the extensive social network she developed through sport. She felt most of her friends would confirm having a similar, positive retirement experience due to the solid social network they had developed from their ongoing sport participation. This consistent social support (e.g., training partners, encouragement through injury recovery) provided stability when other social support associated with work ended which eased her transition into retirement:

> So, the social benefits, of course, most of my friends are track friends. That's basically my friend group. And even friends that they're not competing anymore as intensely as before, they're still friends that I walk with ... they still share that love of sport. In my life and in the majority of my friends. I don't see a strict line from before to after retirement.

This was consistent with Participant 12 who explained how sport participation during his working years provided a strong social network that bridged to retirement. As a result, he

experienced no change in his level of social interaction after retiring, reiterating that pre-existing social networks from sport supported his transition to retirement:

> The thing is, it wasn't really different because the participation was there while I was working, and it is simply continued now that I'm not working. But yeah, it (sport involvement) certainly helps, that's for sure.

There were other benefits attained through a strong social support network. These benefits included feelings of inclusion and an opportunity to have fun, which may disrupt the boredom which can sometimes occur in retirement. These benefits increased in importance to participants after they retired. Participant 9 considered his social group from his daily round of golf as friends. “You’ve got friends at the golf course. So, that is the social aspect for me.” He also liked the inclusion and fun that comes from being in a group. “It's just being there. You are part of a group ...Where else can you go where everybody's there to have fun?” Participant 11 referred to the contacts made through sport as friends and felt this was especially important after retirement. “It's really sort of uplifting making friendships and I think that's for me a really big benefit of being in any sports, one can make those connections.” The results revealed a camaraderie that came from being part of a group or a team, which replaced that found in the working environment, and which was appreciated by Participant 5 who stated: “I loved being part of a team and being active that way.”

Travel is another benefit of sport participation that increased after retirement for the participants who enjoyed travelling to competitions in other countries. With more free time afforded in retirement, they are able to see the world. Not only did this break up their day-to-day routine but it offered another opportunity to make friends. A heightened

excitement was evident as participants explained the anticipation of meeting up with friends made through competitions. Participants felt that the opportunity for travel made the experience of competing bigger than just the event. This enhanced the overall experience and gave them more motivation to train and sign up for events:

> The camaraderie and the socialization, getting to meet other people. And you make [the event] into a destination, things like the World Masters, those are exciting events to go to just because you're going somewhere interesting and meeting people from other countries as well (Participant 10).

Another benefit to participating in sporting events were the opponents who provided opportunity for the friendly banter that is often associated with competition. The level of camaraderie encouraged the back-and-forth ribbing with opponents, allowing for an even greater experience as a competitor, which was a highlight for Participant 7:

> If you're just participating, ... you probably would enjoy the social aspects of what you're doing. But for me, that wouldn't be as much either, because I like the give and take with an opponent and congratulating and getting congratulated, teasing, and getting teased, laughing, and yelling and the frustration.

Several participants felt there was an added benefit of participating in the strong social media presence associated with many masters sport clubs and events. Social media helped to facilitate networking among many of the older athletes, making it easier for them to keep in touch between events. The online postings were largely friendly and supportive. They often included celebratory postings of the results of competitions along with links to training and recovery resources. Keeping in touch between events via social media grew to be an important component of social engagement for many of the

participants once they retired. Participant 1 appreciated keeping in touch with her friends through social media and then having an opportunity to catch up in person at the competitions:

> That's the way it is in masters and whether it's just kind of keeping Facebook friends and just kind of keeping tabs that way you're connecting, trying to connect in some way. The people you meet ... you become friends, it's like everybody's trying to compete and do the best they can so competing is the part where you come together.

Participant 1 suggested that some of her training was done solo. “You know you do so much on your own.” Connecting through competition became an important way to overcome some of the social isolation often associated with training on your own. In contrast, Participant 3, noted that it was the training more than the competition for cycling where his social circle grew. Cycling was something he has done for several years but going on longer group rides since retirement allowed him to experience a deeper social connection with his cycling group which was beneficial to his mental wellbeing and helped to ease his adjustment into retirement:

> Through these [training] rides, I found out some of the most interesting facts about the people that I rode with who I thought I knew well. It turned out, I didn't know them well at all. So just the conversation on the bike, it's almost like being in a psychiatrists office, ... there's no filter, they have the ability to talk about things they don't even talk about with their best friends or their partners, so we've had some really fascinating conversations. For whatever reason, being on the bike

gives them the ability to let their guard down a little bit and open up and talk about things and ask questions of each other that you wouldn't normally do.

These training rides were a regular event which Participant 3 looked forward to and which filled time in his weekly calendar, providing an environment for rich social interaction, something he felt was essential for a healthy retirement. For most of the participants, it was not just the friends they made in their sport that were important in retirement but the wider social network they were exposed to through their participation in other activities they pursued to help them stay involved in sport. These additional resources came by way of cross training (e.g., yoga classes), using supplementary health care (e.g., physiotherapy), and sourcing specialized equipment (e.g., cycling/running store). The people they met through these additional supports provided a wider support network that was essential to continued participation. Thus, the socially stimulating culture/environment of sport became a key component to the participants' successful adjustment to life after retirement.

A renewed focus on sport improved health and wellbeing during retirement

Prioritization of health and wellbeing was difficult for participants when they had to juggle a career and a family. As a result, participants largely had positive thoughts about their retirement with most indicating a better sense of wellbeing since retiring. Participants reported that, with fewer demands on their time, they had gained a renewed focus on their training and competing. Many expressed that they were in the best shape of their lives since retiring. Participant 10 reported that he looked forward to retirement for these very reasons:

> I still have the motivation. In fact, I would say, I would be even more motivated now. And in the last year of my job, I was actually looking forward to retirement so that I could spend more time training and competing.

Part of the renewed focus on training and competing was due to a decrease in scheduled hours that used to be reserved for work or work-related activities (e.g., commuting). Participant 12 appreciated the freedom that not working brought to his schedule which allowed him more flexibility in his training schedule. This flexibility was an important aspect of creating an environment that enabled the maintenance and/or improvement of health and wellbeing when retired:

> I retired just about six, seven years ago now. And in some ways, it's actually enabled me to train a little more freely because when I was still working, the working hours impinged on my training schedule. I can train at more convenient times like during the daylight hours, rather than trying to squeeze it in after work.

Participant 10 echoed this sentiment. “Having the freedom to train when I want, where I want, and having the freedom to go to competitions without worrying about oh, can I afford to take this time off work?”

There was a collective sense of relief among participants that came with retiring and the newfound reduction of work-related stress. The stress of work and raising a family while trying to fit in training and competing was mentioned frequently as a barrier to health and wellbeing. Participant 10 described how his wellbeing had been positively impacted since retirement:

> I would say my wellbeing is in a better place now because there's not that stress that comes from the wear and tear from working the long hours. I'm getting better

> sleep. I was always sleep deprived when I was working because I'd have to get up early and so I never got my eight hours of sleep, so I feel a lot healthier.

Participants also experienced more enjoyment in their sport participation due to reduction/elimination of their stress levels. Participant 9 suggested it was easier to enjoy the physical and social benefits of sport participation when not under constant work-related stress:

> It's a great stress reliever being retired ... you don't have to stress over work. You can go out and enjoy your golf game. And just the physical benefits ... And if you play well, that's great. And if you are playing well with good friends, that's even better.

Experiencing less stress and greater enjoyment in sport participation in retirement was something that participants felt contributed to their improved mental and physical wellbeing as explained by Participant 2. “You can … have the benefit of getting a start on improving your health. Great opportunity to improve your health and get your social [time].” Further, Participant 12 suggested that his involvement in sport not only kept him active but also contributed to improved mental wellbeing by providing an outlet for extra energy he experienced as a result of not having to work:

> It's definitely if I go for more than a day of, let's say, without a [physical] activity, I ... get just sort of restless. I just feel the need to do something to be active. If I couldn't do that, … that would definitely affect my outlook, my mental wellbeing … I would say it’s a central ... a really important part of my life.

Many of the participants cited stories where a parent or other close relative had reduced quality of life in their retirement due to reduced mental capabilities. This was a real fear

for many of the participants and one of the motivations to remain active into retirement. Participant 2 felt that "as I go forward, it also means hopefully, having my mental capacity to avoid dementia, and Alzheimer's, that none of that sort of comes into play." The participants understood that retirement is often associated with a period of decline and hoped to continue in good health for as long as possible. Participants felt that maintaining their autonomy was essential to enjoyment in retirement. Participant 1 explained how the physical benefits of sport participation allowed her this independence because she was "not relying on other people because you can still do it yourself." This is similar to Participant 12 who appreciated "being able to maintain my alertness, health, and activity as long as reasonably possible." Becoming a burden on family was something participants wanted to delay as long as possible. Participation in sport offered many tangible benefits including physical conditioning which allowed them to control existing chronic illness (e.g., high blood pressure), and maintain a healthy weight. The social aspect provided both mental and social stimulation contributing to happiness and independence which were essential to both effectively transition to, and enjoy, retirement. Participants' sport-focused daily habits and behaviours compensated for work-related losses providing both a supportive social network and opportunities for physical activity. These benefits helped participants to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing during retirement.

Importance of sport-for-life

A key finding was that all participants had a long history of participation in sport. This led to the development of fundamental movement skills and a love of sport which provided motivation to work through emergent barriers and declines as they aged. Sport

was foundational in their lives and with the increase in free time to train and compete following retirement, sport became even more of a focus. This enhanced their quality of life, contributing to a smooth transition into retirement. Two sub-themes emerged, including (1) Early introduction to sport was key to lifelong participation; (2) A sport for life mentality made it easier to overcome emergent barriers.

Early introduction to sport was key to lifelong participation

All participants discussed an early introduction to sport and physical activity tracing back to their youth which provided a foundation for them to continue to be active in retirement. It set them up for lifelong participation which continued into retirement providing them with benefits through their life course. Several participants referred fondly to sport as play which occurred mainly in an informal, unorganized setting, including Participant 5 who explained:

> When we were kids, we played every day. We would go to the park with baseball bat and ball and glove and ... 20 kids would show up within a half an hour. And in the winter, we played ball hockey every night. So yeah, it's something we've always done.

The data indicated that participation as a child was often self-directed with little parental involvement, as expanded by Participant 8:

> I was always active when I was a little guy ... always running around. When I was six, I bought my brother's bicycle, so I was always cycling or running. And, and we were always doing something in the neighborhood. My parents, ... they didn't really encourage me the way that I probably encouraged (my) kids ... my parents never came to watch us play baseball or floor hockey. Parents just didn't do that.

Many participants identified this early introduction to free play as fueling their interest in sport. With little guidance from parents or coaches, this early involvement was mainly self-driven and led many of the participants to competitive sport participation as a lifelong behaviour. Daily habits and behaviours enjoyed since youth continued to hold a primary position in the lives of the aging participants which supported their transition to retirement:

> I've been playing sports forever, really since I could pretty much walk ... A big part of my life, a lot of my leisure time outside of work ... has been playing sports, basketball, but also other sports, golf, hockey (Participant 2).

Exposure to multiple sports as a youth was a significant factor for many participants who suggested it was critical to lifelong interest. This initiated a desire to participate through the life course, as Participant 7 explained:

> I think introducing kids to a variety of sports early in life is so critical. You're talking to me now as an older person. But really, the way to get people involved in sports for the rest of their life is to cast the net early, get them involved in a lot of things. That means not ... just clubs that are looking for elite players but getting a wide base of participation in as many sports as you can. For me, sport is just so existential ... it's just if we were meant to play, ... from babies, one of our first impulses is to play. I just want to keep doing it as long as I can. And I don't know what I'm going to do once I can't. That's one of my biggest fears. How am I going to deal with that period of life if it arrives? So that's why I don't stop because I'm afraid if I stop myself, it will be for good.

Data from the interviews suggested that participation in unstructured play and sport furthered an interest and desire to participate. Participant 7 discussed how much harder it is to start a new sport when you have not had early opportunities to learn those skills:

> It's a tough sell to people who haven't really kind of caught that bug earlier in life. Especially if they don't ... have the physical literacy. And that's what's developed from playing multiple sports when you're younger. It's so important because you develop so many skills that are transferable to many things, including as you get older ... mobility and staying active and agile as you age (Participant 7).

Participant 5 suggested that sport is not something that is easy to pick up when you are an older adult and believed early adoption was key to staying active in retirement:

> I think the biggest thing is that it all starts well before people get to 60. I think the challenge is to get people involved after 55 if they haven't been involved. Most people won't do it ... what I find now from, say 55 on is anybody that hasn't really played sports or been actively involved in sports, probably isn't going to suddenly take them up at 60. If you are 45 and you try something for the first time, you're probably not going to be good, and you're probably not going to continue it.

The mobility and agility that participants had and were able to maintain as older adults were key to building confidence that propelled them to continue to train and compete in retirement. An early introduction to sport was important to developing fundamental movement skills and sport-specific skills that allowed for continued sport participation. Participants were fortunate to continue to have the physical ability along with a strong desire to compete in sport, something not always present across the general population of

older retired adults. Although sport participation ebbed and flowed throughout the participants' lifespan dependent on other demands (e.g., kids, career), it was a constant presence in their lives and helped establish lifelong habits and behaviours. This ongoing inclusion of sport provided well established resources for participants which eased their transition to retirement.

A sport for life mentality made it easier to overcome emergent barriers

For many participants, adapting to barriers allowed them to continue to make participation in sport a lifelong priority which was key to their participation as older adults. Participant 13 reflected on how she continually adjusted her physical activity choices due to the demands of her husband's career and her role within her family (stay-at-home mother of four) so she could continue participating into adulthood. She explained:

> I would say, even the whole time since I was in high school, I have exercised pretty much every day. And for a number of those years, like when I wasn't throwing ... when I had young kids and I had to be with the kids all day, ... my husband would get home at five or six ... and I would take off on my bike for an hour.

Because she was able to continue to train while her children were small, she had the physical ability to pick up a javelin again at age 50 and continue what she started in younger years. She further articulated "I guess that would be part of aging well, too. I think it would mean to sort of carry on with the things that you have enjoyed that made you happy for your whole life." This continuity in her sport participation was possible because she was able to overcome earlier barriers to participation. This early experience

helped to build confidence that she could prioritize sport which helped her to continue to adapt and overcome barriers as they arose in later life. Earlier life transitions like marriage, start of a career, and parenthood present challenges which often lead to disengagement and disruption of the continuity of sport. Participants found ways to navigate these and keep sport as a priority in their lives which helped when they experienced the later life transition of retirement. It also allowed them to deal with performance declines which often come due to aging. They did not compare their current performances to past performances, nor did they disengage from their sport because of their age-related performance deterioration. They found ways to accept their own age-related declines and get smarter about how they played their sport:

> It's just the inexorable march of time. I'm not going to be playing tennis at the age of 85 like I do now, at the age of 63. But I hope to be playing ... it just might be a slightly modified version of what you're doing now. Unfortunately, your speed, strength, and agility diminish, but you get smarter. And then you are doing the balancing act, like how can I get smarter to make up for my diminished ... speed? This in itself is an interesting ... and a little competition within the competition. To see how I can still do well even though I'm not as strong as I used to be (Participant 7).

Participant 5 indicated how sport became a choice throughout his life which he considered part of his lifestyle with behaviours and daily habits embedded into his routine which carried him through the transition to retirement:

> It's something I've always done. It's part of my lifestyle. And I think that's important for even people that take up activities is that they have to integrate, ...

make it a part of their lifestyle, what they do every day and not do it because they have to, but [because] they want to do it every day.

These accommodations were also observed at the personal level where participants found ways to adapt their training so they could continue to improve certain components of their sport even as they endured more frequent injuries related to aging, including Participant 8:

> There was a period of time for about 10 years where I had severe muscle strains in my calf muscles and that would put me out for a month or something. And my physiotherapist, ... said, you are just too active, you do too much. I used to run six times a week. But now I don't. I stopped doing that and had to vary my activities. And of course, Movati (referring to the gym he belongs to) has bikes and rowing machines ... so there's a variety of things that are available for cross training.

These modifications allowed him to continue to run and accept the fact that his performance was declining. For him and other participants this did not cause them to disengage from physical activity, but rather prompted them to continually adapt to be able to continue to compete:

> I think it's just to realize, well, it's things are a bit slower. And if certain parts of the body hurt, well, then pay attention and we'll have to make some adjustments maybe, but I still feel ... I can still go out and do things and that's what gets me going (Participant 11).

Participant 10 felt that there were ways to adapt that might one day involve ending his sport competition:

> As you age, if you're a runner like me, maybe running a little bit less, a little bit slower, and maybe eventually being forced to walk instead of running. If I can't run anymore, than maybe just get out there and walk for a couple of hours a day, just to be able to get out there and do something ... just keep moving.

One thing that all participants had in common was consistency in dealing with age-related declines including joint replacements, surgeries, injuries, and other age-related losses which involved making adaptations so they could continue competing in their sport, as described by Participant 7:

> I can't really recall ever, having turned sour on sports. I busted both ankles numerous times, I broke my collarbone three times, and had my shoulder replaced. But that didn't really stop me from playing … there's been nothing else to slow me down or stop me from playing sports. I never have to motivate myself, I just set different goals. I may add something to my repertoire ... I might add a serve with a different grip. Or ... instead of hitting two or three aces in the set, I'll be happy with one. My interest level was just as high. I've never really had to motivate myself.

Opportunities for meaningful competition

Participants felt that participating in sport provided an opportunity to engage in meaningful competition, which they still desired despite being an older retired adult. The element of competition deepened their motivation to train and the increase in free time that came with retirement allowed them to train and compete more regularly. Opportunities for goal setting and self-improvement diminished as those associated with a career ended, but the desire for these did not lessen for participants. Age-graded

competition provided a vehicle for more meaningful competition as athletes competed and compared themselves against others of a similar skillset. Two sub-themes emerged from this theme 1) Competition provided a purpose and motivation; 2) A desire for self-improvement enhanced the competitive experience.

Competition provided a purpose and motivation

Participants placed significant importance on the competition element of their sport, suggesting it gave them a sense of purpose and was a prime motivator to continue to train and push toward their performance goals and develop mastery in their sport. There was an obvious desire among participants to continue to be competitive which spurred them on in their training. Some had a goal of winning an age group medal, others of improving their score, time, or ranking. Some loved the thrill of competing while others had a desire for 'flow' which Participant 13 described as: "Once you're out there, and you're doing it, you get lost in it. Like, as they say, being in the flow". Others were proud of being able to continue to compete despite experiencing declines. Regardless, it was the actual competition which helped to push them to continue to engage in sport.

Along with this desire to compete, registering for a competitive event gave them a set date to aim for and a purpose to train. It initiated planning and goal setting which improved the motivation to live up to the challenge as Participant 4 explained:

> I like to have a race. I think for me, I have to have something that I'm working towards. There are some people I know that will go out every morning and just run and they don't have anything planned. But I have to have a race. I like to have that. I guess the goal of looking forward to that, and also making it a fun event to

> go somewhere. And it's the challenge of getting the training in and trying to do my best that day for the actual race.

The competition itself provided both a purpose and motivation for pursuing excellence in sport. It increased the commitment level which impacted training, as Participant 11 stated. “For me ... the competition gives me a bit of the purpose ... to do the sport or to get out and be out there. Without the competition aspect it would be hard to find the motivation”. Participant 11 also indicated that signing up for an event was a good motivator to keep older athletes on track with their training. “Just the preparation about it, it gives me a bit of a purpose. I know I have this event coming up ... I have more motivation to go out and ski a bit more and push myself a little bit”. Participant 2 further suggested that due to the competitive element there was an incentive toward a higher physical activity level as training increased to meet the demands of the competition:

> I think the competition, … to play at a reasonably high level particularly as you get older ... you have to stay ... in reasonably good shape. Otherwise, you're just not going to be able to keep up in any way, ... so that part of the competition and that desire I think significantly influences the degree of physical activity that I personally want to continue to do.

Participant 4 indicated that competing in racing events provided a level of excitement which had the added advantage of propelling him to greater physical achievement. “I guess being in a race ... the activity that's going on there, and the excitement and you always run faster when you're in a race than you do just in general”.

In the case of Participant 12, it was observing competitive ski racers that got her interested in competing initially. She had been skiing recreationally for years but was

motivated to increase her training so she could compete after seeing older athletes racing by her. "Even while I had been skiing recreationally, every now and then you see people whizzing by who were obviously fast and training. And I thought I liked the looks of that!" The desire to improve her speed was a motivator to start skiing competitively. This competitive ski racer felt that it was the competition element in itself which provided much of the motivation to train harder and push personal limits. Similar to younger athletes, competition increased the desire to train harder as described by Participant 6: "It's heightened because you have a goal. And you ... want to be competitive."

Participant 7 suggested that regardless of the outcome, without competition you "lose the ability to measure yourself and your improvements." Participant 7 further explained how the element of competition helped him to hone his skills:

> When I [play tennis] with my friend, if there's a ball that's just a few inches out of my reach I just let it hit the fence. But if I'm in a game, that ball could seem like it's a mile away, I'm chasing it down to another court. This gives you an ability to measure whether you're improving ... on the downside is of course, how much you're aging.

Participants were eager to remain competitive and appreciated the age-graded events which allowed them to continue to have meaningful experiences. The framing of 'meaningful' was slightly different for each participant but what was consistent was their support of sanctioned age-graded masters sport events. Many participants appreciated that they were set up to account for age-related declines in speed, strength, and endurance suggesting just how critical this was to be able to continue in competitive sport participation as older adults. Age-graded results are calculated using a formula that is

based both on the result (e.g., time/distance) and age. The calculation compensates for age-related declines in strength, endurance, mobility and provides a way for competition to continue to be meaningful for older adults. Participant 10 explained:

> I'm aging, obviously, I'm getting slower every year. But you know, we've got this age-grading calculator that we use that motivates us, because it considers your age and converts your time at that age into a percentage. And so, you know, if you can keep your percentage up or even improve it, then that motivates you as you get slower every year.

Participant 12 noted that Nordic skiing offered shorter race distances at older ages. He explained "they plan for that (referring to age-related declines) because they reduce the distances as you age". He further added "I believe they cut it down one more time, because they don't want the 80-year-olds expiring on the course"! Participant 11 appreciated age-graded competitions for the fact she could "see within your age group where you placed."

Although she had remained active throughout her life, Participant 13 found the opportunity to compete in age-graded competition a motivator to pick up a javelin again when she turned 50. She was very competitive in this sport prior to starting a family but raising four children took her away from competing in the sport for a time. With more free time to focus on training, and a strong desire to see how far she could go in her sport, she signed up for a masters event. She discussed what age-graded competition offered through masters athletics provided for her "When I turned 50, I just decided, well I want to throw again because I had heard about masters athletics." In her case, masters classification with age-graded results encouraged participation. Besides age-grading,

which makes competition more meaningful, participants spoke of the special atmosphere leading up to and during the actual competition which increased the desire for older athletes to want to participate. Participant 11 explained:

> It's different in the sense that there's just a different atmosphere at the competition. I get a different adrenaline level ... getting ready for or being at the competition versus training by myself, or even walking or cycling by myself. I get a different benefit from that. The race allows me to challenge myself and see okay, how good can I be this time?

A desire for self-improvement enhanced the competitive experience

Participants felt they were not slowing down. They demonstrated a desire for continual pursuit of self-improvement through the maintenance and advancement of sport-related knowledge and skills resulting in accomplishments which were both physical (e.g., personal bests, age group records, adapting to constraints) and psychosocial (e.g., overcoming losses, building new social networks). Although they enjoyed being competitive, participation was also about personal development. They viewed sport competition beyond the wins and losses, seeing it as an opportunity to set goals, train, measure, and find ways to improve, which to them was an important aspect of evolving as a person. Participant 4 indicated “It's not about winning or losing, it's about, am I meeting my usual standard? I like measuring myself against other people. And I couldn't do that if I wasn't keeping score.” Although this quote may appear somewhat contradictory, it is the comparison to others and themselves that allowed participants to seek personal bests. For some participants this was often more important than wins and losses, demonstrating the complexity of motivational factors in

competition. Many participants used results to validate their training with the hope of tweaking it to continually improve:

> Most sports are designed to create a winner, and loser ... I think we're all winners if we play, but nothing wrong with keeping track of how you're doing, because it just helps reinforce what you've been doing, and motivates you in the future to do a little bit better (Participant 7).

Participants were comfortable obtaining feedback on how they are doing by comparing their results to others in a similar age grouping. They were used to performance evaluation in their career, and this was similar. Participants used different methods of pushing themselves including tracking their training and performance over time which provided purpose and meaning to them after retirement. Participant 9, self-described as a 'numbers guy', used a spreadsheet to track his annual rounds of golf and his physical training in the off season which allowed him to stay fit for his sport. He tracked his results so he could compare them to previous years:

> I track the number of times I've worked out in a year, the number of times I go golfing, the number of steps that I have, the number of days that I have over 10,000 steps and the number of days I've got over 10 kilometers based on my steps.

Being competitive as they aged appeared to be more about finding ways to keep adapting to continue to compete, improve, and maintain a level of fitness. This involved a significant element of personal challenge, as explained by Participant 4:

> I guess it's just my own personal challenge. It's part of my lifestyle, the effort to achieve and to do my best. And that's always been my prime motivation … to see what I can accomplish.

There were indications of participants evolving in their perceptions of what it meant to compete and to do so successfully helping to gain insight into why older adults might compete. It was about understanding the limitations that came as a result of an aging body and adjusting the expectations they put on themselves, so these limitations did not discourage them from continuing to compete in retirement. Participant 5 provided an example of how many older adults modified expectations as they aged to continue to pursue accomplishment through sport:

> In the early days, when I was in my prime, it was trying to get faster, trying to run personal bests, trying to win championships and things like that. And now ... it's pushing myself to the limit, just seeing what my body can do.

There was some indication that the desire for challenge and self-improvement might be motivated by the need to fulfill dreams from younger years, as Participant 13, who threw javelin, explained:

> As a young kid, I had always dreamed of going to the Olympics. But I thought okay, well, this is not really the Olympics [referring to world masters competitions], but it'd be cool to go to an actual world meet.

For Participant 13, this was an opportunity to compete on the world stage, something she had always wanted to do. Her experience was further enhanced when she experienced success. “And I won. So, you know, then I got hooked.” Her positive results motivated her to continue to seek opportunities for self-improvement. Participants discussed how

becoming skillful at any sport required repetition over time. It required prioritizing the training and practice, making them daily habits which replaced much of the structure participants had previously experienced in their working environment. Their desire for self-improvement manifested itself in several ways. Participant 13 started throwing a javelin again at age 50 years, motivated by a need to master her technique:

> I never felt I had finished throwing javelin. It was like there were more throws in there. I figured out only when I restarted when I was 50 that I never had the correct technique. When I was young, I think I was just young and strong and thought I must be doing it correctly. Turns out, I was doing nothing correctly ... so, what keeps me going now? I'm still trying to figure out how to do it right.

For many of the participants, mastery of their sport or technique involved setting goals and then seeking help or advice from a coach or peer with more experience. This along with purposeful practice helped them to achieve their goals. This was demonstrated by participants, many of whom had success on the world stage. They were interested in mastering their event so they could pursue personal bests, world records, rankings, and trophies. For Participant 6, more free time in retirement allowed her to focus her training to pursue a higher level of personal achievement which resulted in moving up in the world rankings:

> It's different than just playing for fun. There's the putting yourself up against the rest of the world, like in track and field because they're always posting the ... world rankings. And so, when I see myself, in the top 10, ... it makes me want to get out there and practice and do more. If I'm just doing it for fun, okay, you get a laugh here and there because you're with your friends or something, but there's

not the real motivation to keep going or to improve. I'm eighth right now in the world, and I want to be top five ... maybe there's a little bit of ego in there. I like winning ... I like being better than other people.

For participants, the desire for personal improvement provided motivation and defined their achievements, adding to their personal fulfillment in retirement.

The findings suggested that sport participation was instrumental to participants' successful transition to retirement as the increased availability of time provided an opportunity to engage in sport more fully, making it a focal point that was well-integrated into their lives. Sport was already a regular activity in their lives that had been established early in life and provided them continued health and wellbeing in retirement. Daily habits and behaviours, once focused on work, changed to revolve around maintaining sport participation following retirement. This compensated for work-related losses including a social network. Participants stressed the importance of lifelong sport participation which fostered a sport-for-life mentality making it easier to overcome emergent barriers which may increase after retirement (e.g., lack of mobility). Participants noted the importance of opportunities for meaningful competition as they aged, with competition providing a purpose and meaning to train and perform, and an opportunity for self-improvement which was critical to their fulfillment in retirement.

Discussion

This study provided insight into the role of sport participation in retirement and its potential for improving the health and wellbeing of an aging baby boomer cohort (born between 1946-1965). Chronic diseases that can be avoided or reduced through regular physical activity increase significantly in the decade following retirement (McPhee et al., 2016), which makes maintaining an active lifestyle critical for an aging population. Understanding the role of sport in retirement is important as this transition is viewed as a critical time for influencing health-related behaviours and may provide a window for the promotion of sport as a physical activity (Barbosa et al., 2016). Data analysis revealed the lived experiences of participants and demonstrated how sport participation facilitated social connections, health, and wellbeing among this group. Participant narratives provided evidence of continued participation in competitive sport which challenged the essence of aging, largely ignoring historical societal expectations which have been associated with decline, and instead framed retirement as a new phase of life which may encourage growth, freedom, and exploration (Hardy, 2011; Sargent-Cox et al., 2012). Sport was already an established lifestyle characteristic among participants, which continued following retirement as more free time allowed for sport to be a significant influencer of behaviour. Early sport participation was observed as an antecedent of participation later in life, reiterating the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful participation through the life course. For most of the participant sample of older adults, age-graded master's sport events provided authentic competition allowing them to compete and compare themselves to other athletes in similar age groupings. The importance of maintaining continuity throughout the life course was reinforced by the

benefits perceived by the participants from their engagement in sport following retirement. Sections below will explore how key findings supported, extended, and challenged previous literature.

Resources gained through sport participation are key to retirement transition

Previous research has viewed retirement as a major life event which involves a transition in social roles and societal expectations, offering both opportunities and challenges (Ekerdt, 2010; Hansson et al., 2018). As participants continued or increased their sport participation in retirement, they were able to maintain or replace many of the resources (e.g., social network, daily structure) lost when their career ended. Due to this, sport participation met several of their physical as well as psychosocial needs. For example, the loss of work-related daily structure did not seem as daunting to participants as they drew satisfaction from the fact that they had more time to devote to their athletic pursuits. Participants were content that time spent training and competing helped to fill their day which was no longer scheduled around work demands. They enjoyed the associated benefits which included opportunities for physical and intellectual challenge, comradery, daily routine, performance tracking, and goal setting. Atchley (1989) suggested a need to re-prioritize activities and social networks that may diminish following life transitions such as retirement. The opportunities that came by way of more free time for leisure pursuits, along with less work-related stress, provided daily structure and made training and competing more enjoyable. Baltes and Baltes' (1990) model of selective optimization with compensation is based on the premise that age-related losses will occur (e.g., job, spouse, mobility) and older adults find ways to compensate for and adapt to these losses. In this context, and supported by the findings, sport may ease the

transition to retirement by compensating for or providing a means to adapt to losses that come at the end of a career. Specifically, participants' sport participation replaced opportunities for goal setting and the pursuit of achievement which are often enjoyable aspects of a working environment (Dorfman, 2013; Jonsson et al., 2001). Participation prior to retirement also offered continuity in a social network that was developed through life-long involvement in sport, providing additional social support so that the loss of the social network from work did not escalate social isolation in retirement. Findings suggested that retirement offered more time to train and compete, which filled daily schedules previously reserved for work-related activities. The pursuit of sport-related activities thus became similar to a career for participants and aligned with the definition of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1992). Stebbins (1992) describes serious leisure as a pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that can be similar to a career in that it provides a substantial, interesting, and fulfilling combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience.

Several studies have reported that serious leisure pursuits often increase in importance after retirement as new retirees seek to replace many of the benefits associated with a career (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014; Kennelly et al., 2013; Stebbins, 1992). This was evident with participants as sport became a central focus in their lives, with time and effort mimicking that required for a career. As participants put in effort to gain specialized sport-specific skill and knowledge (e.g., training), sport provided participants with an ethos (e.g., ideals, values), and a social world (e.g., sport-specific friends and social network) which enhanced their personal and social identity and assisted them in challenging negative aging stereotypes. As such, participants had a sense of

purpose, stimulating challenge, and new opportunities for personal achievement. Sport was a highly prioritized commitment which increased participants' dependence on their sport practice as evidenced by daily structure, goal setting, physical activity, and travel, contributing to psychological, physiological, aesthetic, and social satisfaction. This demonstrated the prepotency of serious leisure to require a greater commitment and responsibility over that associated with more casual sport participation (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014; Kennelly et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015; Stebbins, 1992). Researchers have established a link between serious leisure and leisure satisfaction suggesting that the lives of participants were impacted favourably prior to and following retirement due in part to their continued pursuit of sport as serious leisure (e.g., Park et al., 2016; Stebbins, 2012). Lee et al. (2015) studied the impact of serious leisure on aging, analyzing the difference between physical, cognitive, and social leisure, and reported no significant differences between these types of serious leisure on successful aging. Although there is considerable literature on aging and sport that focus on older adults (e.g., Adams et al., 2011; Baker et al., 2010; Cardenas et al; 2009; Deneau et al., 2020; 2021), these studies do not specifically address the issues related to retirement, an area in which the research can offer a subtle yet important contribution to the existing literature.

Along with physiological benefits, the ethos and social world accessed through participation in sport as serious leisure created 'social capital' (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014; Stebbins, 2017). According to Dekker and Uslaner (2003), social capital is the value of social networks and associated norms of reciprocity which create bonds among similar people and bridges between diverse people. Fiori and Jager (2012) suggest that adjusting these social networks may mitigate some of the losses associated with

adaptations to life transitions, including retirement. Life cycle transitions such as retirement may impact social participation, thereby reducing social support as work-related social networks end. This can increase the risk of social isolation and loneliness which have been identified as risk factors contributing to poor aging outcomes (Valtorta & Hanratty, 2012). Social support is a critical aspect of healthy aging (National Institute on Aging, 2019) and is derived from participation in social networks through engagement in activities along with associated interpersonal interactions (Aroogh & Shaboulaghi, 2020). Many of the benefits are derived from the dyadic characteristics of the social network where support and resources are reciprocal and complex (Heaney et al., 2008). For participants, they largely fell under four categories of support including emotional (e.g., encouragement), instrumental (e.g., training partner), informational (e.g., sharing of training resources), and appraisal (e.g., coaching; Heaney et al., 2008). Support came by way of a friend group established through their sport participation which was instrumental in providing a social media connection (e.g., Facebook) during the recent Covid-19 pandemic, allowing participants to stay in touch when events were temporarily disbanded. This larger social network included both the local group and national and international competitors who offered participants injury support and advice, companionship when travelling to competitions, a training group, friendly competition to prepare for events, and hosts when travelling to international destinations to compete. Participants looked forward to their workouts and events largely due to the friends they would be seeing while participating.

After retiring, participants adjusted their social networks to focus more on those generated through sport which helped to buffer the loss of their work-related social

network. Moen (1996) suggested that a loss of roles, social integration, and daily structure, all once provided by a job or career, often contribute to diminished health and wellbeing in retirement. Participants demonstrated that these losses may be offset by sport participation which provided sources of social integration and helped motivate participants to continue to adapt to age related declines so they could continue to compete. This is consistent with the continuity theory of aging which suggests that individuals adapt to age-related changes by maintaining consistency in their lives, thereby contributing to enhanced health and wellbeing later in life (Atchley, 1989). As such, participation in sport following retirement provided continuity of their sport-related social network, which was established while participants were still working, and which grew to replace their work-related social networks after retirement. Consistency in sport participation allowed participants to maintain both internal (e.g., experience, skills, preferences) and external (e.g., activities, social environments) structures (Atchley, 1989), providing evidence of continuity and supporting the ability of sport to protect or extend social networks after retirement (Castellano-Fuentes, 2014; Dysktra, 2015; Santini et al., 2015). The benefits of a strong social network, as participants in the study demonstrated, were consistent with previous research that associated social capital and human capital with better late-life health such as higher levels of happiness, confidence, and self-esteem (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011a; 2011b). These outcomes impacted participants' mental health and wellbeing contributing to more fulfillment in retirement and may provide a deeper understanding of the importance of social support during and following important life transitions such as retirement (Castellano-Fuentes, 2014; Dykstra, 2015; Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011a; 2011b).

Along with social benefits, sport participation provides numerous mental and physical health benefits and is an optimal activity for the maintenance and improvement of health among older adults (Baker et al., 2010; Tahira 2021). Consistent with existing literature, participants felt they had experienced improved mobility, functionality, and chronic disease management which they suggested would contribute to a longer period of healthy aging and autonomy (Baker et al., 2010; Choi et al., 2020; Dionigi & Gard, 2018; Etnier et al., 2019). Retirement afforded participants the opportunity to get in better physical shape due to a renewed focus on sport participation with many suggesting they were in the best shape of their lives. This is consistent with several earlier studies which found that physical activity in general increased following retirement due to fewer time constraints and the perception that the start of retirement is a time to take up healthy habits (Beck et al., 2010; Barnett, et al., 2012a; 2012b; Brown et al., 2009; Godfrey et al., 2014; Lahti et al., 2011; Menai et al., 2014). Notably, participants already had well established healthy habits going into retirement demonstrating a continuity in their lifestyle choices. This continuity in the pattern of lifelong participation is similar to Naderyan et al. (2019), suggesting physical activity in later life may be a continuation of physical activity in earlier life.

Participants expressed that picking up a new sport in one's older years following a life of inactivity would not be easy, nor was it commonly seen among their peer group. Although anticipating retirement may encourage some older adults to get more active, previous studies reported that many older adults lapsed into reduced physical activity habits once they were actually entrenched in retirement (Beck et al., 2010; Barnett et al., 2012a; 2012b; Menai et al., 2014). These studies were focused on general physical

activity (e.g., walking) and not on sport, so it is difficult to draw comparisons to participants, whose own sport endeavors increased rather than declined following retirement. What this does stress is the importance of lifelong participation habits to ensure a greater likelihood of continuity in retirement, making opportunities for earlier engagement critical.

Early engagement in sport sets the stage for participation in retirement

Sport played a central role in the lives of participants, with evidence of it being a longstanding, stable lifestyle characteristic which started in their youth. It has been established that early childhood is an important window for developing life-long healthy habits, including those that promote physical activity (Tonge et al., 2020). Several participants enjoyed a childhood filled with play which was both self-directed and unstructured (Bundy et al., 2011). They enjoyed activities with little or no adult involvement including gathering a group of children to play a continuum of sports (e.g., playground baseball, street hockey). There was time spent in negotiation to adapt the rules to accommodate the number of children or the lack of equipment. This encouraged self-determination and provided a sense of freedom as participants decided if they would participate, with whom they would participate, and how the rules might be modified to provide maximum enjoyment (Erickson & Côté, 2015; Kerchhoff et al., 2017). This style of play and the mindset that accompanies it is often responsible for initiating prolonged engagement in sport which was consistent with participants in the study (Clancy et al., 2017). Many felt these experiences ignited a love of sport that has continued through their lifespan. This aligned with several studies which linked play with enjoyment and enhanced well-being, which has been associated with prolonged participation (Clancy et

al, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The developmental model of sport participation (DMSP) argues that significant amounts of 'deliberate play' (e.g., fun, intrinsically motivated and may include pick-up games where peers define the rules), including activities that are enjoyable during the sampling years, build a solid foundation for intrinsic motivation which may encourage lifelong participation (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hancock, 2016).

An early diversification path of playing multiple sports in youth, is also critical because it can develop competence in a variety of motor skills (e.g., jumping, catching, running) which have been discovered to be foundational for a range of sport options in later life (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2009; Erickson & Côté, 2015). Along with contributing to positive health and wellbeing, these motor skills can enhance functionality and the acquisition of sport-specific skills (e.g., swinging a bat or club, blocking a shot) that transfer across a variety of sports (Robinson et al., 2015). Research suggests that confidence gained from the development of these skills is key to initiating intrinsic motivation which leads to self-regulated future sport participation, and that sport activities in the sampling years (ages 6-12) are predictors of leisure time physical activity in adulthood (Erickson & Côté, 2015; Makela et al., 2017). Developing basic fundamental movements early in life can build motor skills which can provide initial feelings of accomplishment. This may assist in the development of confidence and resilience that help to sustain lifelong engagement in sport (Jeffreys et al., 2019). Participants showed determination to work through age-related declines and injuries and felt that without resilience, when things got difficult, it was easy to disengage from sport. Overcoming obstacles early (described by participants as negotiating to play with older kids, and small gains like connecting a ball to a baseball bat) were difficult yet attainable,

and provided a foundation for bigger competencies that were required to negotiate injuries and age-related declines to continue to participate in sport in later life. Participants agreed that training became more difficult as they got older but their foundation in sport which built their confidence and motivation helped to fuel their desire to continue to participate. This is consistent with Whitehead (2010), who suggested that individuals lacking in confidence, motivation, and self-esteem are more likely to have lower incentive to participate in physical activity.

Early positive experiences in play and sport by participants played a role in facilitating higher self-confidence, leading to continued desire for competition as they aged. Previous research has established the critical importance of access to early learning opportunities in sport as motivation for continued involvement as one ages, suggesting it may be challenging to develop fundamental movement skills and confidence (e.g., physical literacy) if they were not experienced in childhood (Côté,1999; Jeffreys et al., 2019; MacNamara et al., 2015). Research suggests that individuals who are physically literate participate more fully in their community and wider society (Taplin, 2019). Although physical literacy in an older adult population has not been extensively researched, Taplin (2019) suggests that successful aging can be supported by creating new opportunities to enjoy a diversity of physical activity choices, including sport, which was consistent with participants in the study. There are several examples in the media where older adults have had success as athletes who start later in life so it would not be prudent to suggest that it is impossible for older adults without early exposure to sport to participate following retirement. The view of retirement as a time of new opportunity held by many older adults may provide an opportunity to try to activities, like sport.

Participants spoke of success promoting sport to peers who had not previously participated, emphasizing it is never too late.

Opportunities for meaningful competition stimulated participation after retirement

Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) suggests there are significant stages of development in life that include numerous transitions from child to older adult, resulting in changing physical capabilities. CS4L recommends that quality sport opportunities be geared to specific life stages, yet one of the barriers to participation for older adults is the lack of appropriate playing opportunities (Jenkin et al., 2017). Competing against younger adults in open competitions may be too difficult or discouraging for an older population looking for relevant competitive experiences. Several participants discussed their desire to continue seeking challenges that stretched their abilities, arguing that masters sport, which utilizes age-graded results and a progression of adapted equipment (e.g., lighter javelin), provides opportunities for meaningful competition. For older adults experiencing regular aging-related declines (e.g., speed, endurance, mobility), masters competitions can provide a viable way to continue to compete. In the case of participants, these events provided an opportunity, along with continued purpose and motivation, for pursuing sport. Smaller age categories (e.g., 50-54) and age-graded results, along with modifications to distances and equipment provide an environment where declines in performance due to age are accommodated for. USA Track and Field (USATF) and World Masters Athletics (WMA) produce tables based on their calculations of the relationship between top international performances at different distances by athletes of varying ages (Francis, 2018). These tables provide age-grading factors that can be multiplied by an actual time for any distance and is based on your age and gender,

providing an outcome accounting for the natural decline associated with age (Francis, 2018). These modifications allowed participants to experience meaningful competition by providing a way to compare the performance of athletes of all ages. To participants, having opportunities to compete was often what motivated them to stay engaged in training after retirement. Other studies indicate a need for competition and a feeling of achievement to stay engaged, suggesting it is often the competition itself which drives an athlete to participate fully by putting in maximum training effort and striving to hit personal goals (Jenkin et al., 2017; Stenner et al., 2020).

While discussing meaningful competition, two participants suggested they had experienced 'flow' in their competitions, something that has been studied primarily with younger, elite athletes (e.g., Jackman et al., 2020). Flow is described as a positive psychological state achieved when there is a balance between a challenge and the skills to meet that challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). As such, flow occurs when an athlete experiences just enough of a challenge to stretch their current development but where they have the skills to meet the challenge presented. Age-graded competition can provide an opportunity for flow to occur, especially as flow is influenced by joy in the activity itself (intrinsic), and not by an external reward (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000), although several participants indicated that external rewards (e.g., medals, awards, rankings) were also important. This suggests a need to consider multiple motivational factors in masters-level sport competition so it can appeal to a greater number of older adults. Although participants largely accepted the declines in performance related to their age and adjusted their performance goals accordingly (e.g., slower time goals) they still had the desire to have meaningful competitive experiences. Participants continued to find

meaning in competition despite these concessions related to age and emphasized the importance of access to competition throughout the lifespan.

Sport has been contextualized in western culture as performance-driven competitive activity for a younger population, yet Coakley (2015) suggests sport can be a facilitator of pleasurable experiences and personal growth for older adults, which was evident with participants. Older adults' ability to maintain competitive levels in both their training and performance might be due, in part, to their available resources, including more leisure time post retirement and greater access to coaching, specialized equipment, and facilities, which is consistent with the results of Lepers and Stapley (2016). Competitive pursuits helped participants develop meaning and sense of purpose in life by providing opportunities for achievement, minimizing isolation, expanding social networks, and providing daily structure in their lives. Participants discussed how overcoming chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, hypertension) and age-related declines (e.g., lack of mobility) and their ongoing adaptation to continue to pursue sport led to both personal development and personal achievement. Without these possibilities, older adults often feel lost and unproductive (Silver, 2019). Achievement came in the form of winning medals, or moving up rankings, or in setting a personal best. Participants expressed achievement as overcoming injury or decline to continue to pursue sport. The same values that are placed on youth sport (e.g., development of transferable skills like determination, perseverance, ability to contribute to a team) were important to the participants. Some of this was demonstrated in participants' ability to continually adjust to age-related declines in performance by taking more rest days, doing more cross training, and using supplementary healthcare. The data demonstrate that in order to

continue to participate in sport, participants had to adapt to their individual experiences of aging, which included navigating losses associated with retirement and declines associated with an aging body (e.g., mobility). Thus, adaptation was key to maintaining patterns of physical activity across their life course. Maintaining sport participation was important to participants because, following retirement, sport grew to have a bigger role in their lives, offering them a source of meaning and purpose. Retiring from a career can affect one's social identity, making it harder to feel relevant (Jolles et al., 2022).

Contemporary psychology researchers suggest that the presence of meaning comes from having a sense of purpose, feeling that life is worth living, and feeling that life is logical (Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martella & Steiger, 2016). Thus, overcoming age-related declines to continue to engage in meaningful competition through sport became more than a way to stay fit and healthy. It provided a deeper sense of meaning through the setting of goals and the structure of daily training for personal achievement which provided participants a sense of purpose, a feeling that life is worth living, and a feeling that life is cohesive. Essentially, the ability to continue to compete is what kept many participants engaged in sport. This is consistent with other studies including those seeking to understand why older adults play sports (Cheng et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2012).

Conclusion

This study provided greater perspective on the topic of competitive sport participation as a meaningful activity for the baby boomer generation as they go through the significant life transition of retirement. Similarly to participants in other studies (e.g., Gard et al., 2017; Heo et al., 2013; Horton et al., 2018), sport provided participants with a rich social setting that revolved around a common interest to train and compete. This study built on previous literature related to the role of sport as serious leisure and how it can replace a social network and provide opportunities for goal setting and the pursuit of achievement, which are often lost after retirement. There was continuity in sport participation with evidence of it playing a vital role in their lives from a young age, which assisted them in developing lifelong social relationships, daily habits, and behaviours that contributed to their successful navigation of retirement. Early introduction to play and sport built fundamental movement skills which were important for building confidence which helped to fuel their determination to work through age-related declines to continue to compete after retirement. This deeper understanding of sport and retirement reiterates the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful participation throughout the life course, which may assist health promotion organizations in developing appropriate sport opportunities to aid in the health and wellbeing of an aging population. As such, this study expanded existing literature on sport participation and its role in easing the retirement experience for participants who are within the baby boomer cohort.

Practical Implications

Although public health organizations already perceive sport as a physical activity option among older adults that may provide a preventative way to reduce health care spending, there is a need for earlier intervention to ensure that more people carry sport into their older years. Participants demonstrated how sport is a viable physical activity option that can support the psychosocial and physiological aspects of healthy aging and the transition to retirement. Retirement planning typically includes financial consultation but could benefit from a more holistic approach which also anticipates other types of needs. Sport for older adults should be a consideration in both retirement planning, and health promotion and policy initiatives for an aging population which is expected to increase the demand for resources that contribute to long-term health and wellbeing. To encourage sport for retired older adults there is a need to increase both the resources to participate (e.g., coaching, equipment) and the availability of competitive sport opportunities (e.g., age-graded masters events). To facilitate this, it will be important to continue to develop National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) coaching modules that meet the unique needs of coaches working with older athletes and provide financial support to coaches who want to specialize in this area. Another consideration is the development and promotion of workshops and clinics to refine both fundamental movement skills and sport skills for older adults. Youth programming includes time for practice and skill development along with opportunities to compete. This is missing from sport for older adults where programming is primarily focused only on competition. Programming that includes skill development, particularly for older adults who are currently not participating in sport, might increase participation by older adults, as the

lack of confidence has been shown to have a negative effect on participation rates of older adults (Whitehead, 2010). To ensure these opportunities are available, community sport organizations must prioritize masters sports when designing and scheduling programs, including offering "Try it Days' so older adults can try new sports. This should extend to placing more emphasis on hosting masters competitions to increase local sport tourism and encouraging corporate sponsorships of these events, to increase its prominence in the community. This, along with advocating sport manufacturers to adapt to the needs of an aging population (e.g., helmets that work with hearing aids, larger print on instructions), will help to further promote sport as a viable physical activity option for older adults.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study expanded the current literature by providing insight into sport and retirement of older adults, there were several limitations inherent in the study. Participants were at the top of the physical activity spectrum for their age, and financially stable enough to pay for events, training resources, and equipment. They were also a homogeneous group with respect to ethnic and educational background. By reaching out to several sport organizations (e.g., rowing club, golf course, basketball club, track and field association), attempts were made to solicit participation from a diverse group. In fact, when organizations were contacted about the study, there was emphasis on circulating information to an ethnically diverse group to ensure participation but this is the group who volunteered for the study. As such, participants were similar to those in previous studies involving masters athletes (Taylor et al., 2015; Toepoel, 2013). Although currently the majority of the Canadian population identifies as White, this is

expected to change with 450 ethnic or cultural origins being reported in the 2021 Census (Statistics Canada, 2022). As such, future studies focused on sport and an aging population within a heterogenous population will ideally be more representative of the changing Canadian population, but additional recruitment strategies would need to be established to ensure this occurs. Another limitation of this study was that it did not attract participants who demonstrated psychosocial barriers to participation, such as discrimination or a lack of confidence. In fact, participants in the study could wholly participate in sport as an enriching life experience which may not be indicative of the general population of older adults. Participants had both resilience and strength in overcoming challenges, but also privilege. Participants' ease of access to opportunities may set an unrealistic standard for those who cannot participate in competitive sport as a result of these barriers. Understanding the variations in both retirement and aging experiences might help to reinforce how heterogeneous the experiences of this cohort are so that programs can be designed that more adequately match their individualized needs. The importance of competition to participants in the study revealed one additional area for future research. Although competition in sport has been well researched among a younger participant base, particularly related to males, it is not well researched among older adults. While previous studies have looked at the psychosocial benefits of sport and older adults more generally (e.g., Gayman et al., 2017), and specific to older males (e.g., Deneau et al., 2020), and older females (e.g., Horton et al., 2018) there have been few that specifically explore the meaning of sport competition among an older population. As such, competitive sport for older adults remains a timely yet under-researched area of inquiry.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Study Information Sheet

Title of Study: *The role of competitive sport participation in the lives of baby boomers navigating retirement.*

This research study is being conducted by Master of Human Kinetics Candidate Dale Bellaire, and co-supervised by Dr. Sean Horton and Dr. Patti Millar from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Windsor.

Purpose of the study

Older adults are greatly underrepresented in sport compared to other age groups (e.g., youth), yet there is evidence to suggest that sport participation is increasing in the age 65+ group from 12.5% in 2018 to 16% in 2021 (CFLRI, 2018; CFLRI; 2021). As sport participation rates have increased for older adults, scholars have sought to understand its role in health and wellbeing. Promoting sport participation for this demographic may increase the possibility of successful aging for those who participate and points to the important role of continued physical activity in navigating the aging process (Geard et al., 2021). Retirement is viewed as a major life event which involves a transition in social roles and societal expectations offering both opportunities and challenges (Ekerdt, 2010; Hansson et al., 2017). Retirement is considered a critical time for influencing health-related behaviours including physical activity and may provide a window for the promotion of sport (Barbosa et al., 2016; Barnett, 2012; Godfrey et al., 2014)

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of competitive sport participation among baby boomers and its role in navigating life post retirement. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the role of competitive sport participation in facilitating social connections, health, and wellbeing among retirees. Your opinions, understandings, feelings, and experiences will help better inform programs and policies intended to promote and enhance the participation of retired adults in sport.

Participant Criteria

In order to participate in this study, individuals must currently be retired from the workforce and have a birthdate between 1946 and 1965. Participants must currently participate in masters level competition and practice for their sport at least once per week (apart from injuries) and compete in a competition at least once per season and be willing to discuss this in an interview.

Participation Inclusion

To ensure a multitude of perspectives, the study will be inclusive of adults irrespective of gender (e.g., male, female, non-binary individuals) or ethnic identification, including individuals navigating age-related impairments, injury, disease and/or disability.

Participant Expectations

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview which is expected to take ~1 hour. This interview can take place over the phone or using a videoconferencing or video-calling tool of your choice (e.g., Teams, Zoom).

A $25 (CAD) compensation (gift card) will be provided to those who participate in an interview.

For additional information or to volunteer as a participant, please contact:

Dale Bellaire, Candidate, Master of Human Kinetics, Department of Kinesiology, University of Windsor
410 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, N9B 3P4
Email: bellaird@uwindsor.ca

Appendix B: Study Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: *The role of competitive sport participation in the lives of baby boomers navigating retirement.*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dale Bellaire and co-supervised by Dr. Sean Horton and Dr. Patti Millar from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Windsor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact the lead investigator whose full details are listed below:

Dale Bellaire, Candidate, Master of Human Kinetics, Department of Kinesiology, University of Windsor
410 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, N9B 3P4
Email: bellaird@uwindsor.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of competitive sport participation among baby boomers and its role in navigating life post retirement. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the role of competitive sport participation in facilitating social connections, health, and wellbeing among retirees. Findings will help inform programs and policies intended to promote participation in sport among this demographic. To ensure a multitude of perspectives, the study will be inclusive of adults irrespective of gender (e.g., male, female, non-binary individuals) or ethnic identification, including individuals navigating age-related impairments, injury, disease and/or disability.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview which is expected to take ~1 hour. This interview can take place over the phone or using a videoconferencing or video-calling tool of your choice (e.g., Teams, Zoom).

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

We do not anticipate any burdens or risks to you resulting from your participation in this study. To reduce the risks of undue pressure to participate from someone you might know on the research team, we emphasise that your participation is completely voluntary, and your decision to participate or not in this project will have no effect on your relationships

with any member of the research team. Also, you have the right to end your participation without any consequences.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study. As an indirect benefit, you will help create new knowledge that may have a positive impact on the sport-related opportunities available to you. Findings will provide an in-depth understanding of the meaning of sport in the lives of retired baby boomers which will be of value to policy makers in the development of various initiatives that target this specific audience and will serve to encourage and enhance participation through equitable and sensitive means.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
You will be offered a $25.00 CAD (or equivalent) gift card for your participation in the one-hour interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. All data obtained from individual participants will be kept strictly confidential in a controlled access location (locked filing cabinet or in a password protected computer file until the completion of the investigation). Only the investigator and supervisors will have access to participants' identities. Pseudonyms will be used during data analysis and in all reports or publications arising from the research. Once the investigation is completed all data will be stored under lock and key in a master filing cabinet within the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Windsor for a period of seven years.

All interviews performed online will be audio and video recorded. All telephone interviews will be audio recorded. By giving your consent to participate in this study, you agree to the audio and video taping of interviews and related procedures. You understand that these procedures are voluntary, but that consenting to the audio recording of all interviews is required to participate in this study. You are free to request that that the recording be stopped at any time and resumed after a brief pause. Also, you may shut off the video camera on your computer anytime so that the recording of the image stops, while the audio recording will continue.
You have up to two weeks after the interview is completed to request that your data be withdrawn from the study. You also understand that your name will not be revealed to anyone, that recordings will be kept confidential, and that the audio and video files will be for professional use only. Tapes or digital files will be filed by number only, stored in a locked cabinet or password protected file, and will be destroyed after transcription and verification.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you volunteer to be involved, you may withdraw without consequences of any kind. We ask you to kindly contact Dale Bellaire, up to two weeks after the completion of your in-depth interview, to let her know if you decide to withdraw from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions

and remain in the study. The investigators may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. The lead investigator on this study, Dale Bellaire, can be reached by email at bellaird@uwindsor.ca or by phone at 519-998-7188.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS
Research findings or a summary of the results will be available at:
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/
Anticipated date when results will be available: September 2022
SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA
These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
You have the right to consent, or not to consent, to participate in this study. Should you decide to participate you have the right to discontinue participation in the study without penalty. You also have the right to have your data withdrawn from the study up to two weeks after the completion of your in-depth interview. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: The Office of Research Ethics, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE
I understand the information provided for the study "The role of competitive sport in the lives of baby boomers navigating retirement" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given an electronic or paper copy of this form.

_____
Name of Participant

_____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____
Name of Researcher

_____
Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Part 1 - Demographic Identification

Part 1 will be filled out by the interviewer during the scheduled interview. This guide is for your reference only.

Study Qualifier
To participate in this study Individuals must (a) have experienced the phenomenon that is being studied (e.g., be a **retiree who *competes (see definitions) in an individual or a team sport), (b) have a birthdate between 1946 and 1965.

***Definition for the purpose of this study- What is competitive sport?**
Sports that are individual (e.g., running, throwing, biking, rowing, tennis) or group/team (e.g., basketball, hockey, doubles tennis) etc., which have some element of competition which may include working up or down a ladder, awards, medals, elimination or competing to end with a winner.

The interviewer will provide clarification for anything you are not sure of during the upcoming interview.
Full name:
Year of Birth:
Gender:
Phone Number:
Email Address:
Postal code:
What is the language you speak most often?
What is the highest level of education that you completed?
Ethnic origin/cultural heritage: what would you say is the ethnic or cultural group that you belong to or identify with?
Are you currently **retired from full-time employment/caregiving/homemaking?
What sports do you participate in at a competitive level?
How often do you train for those sports per week?
How often do you compete in those sports per week?
Are you affiliated with any athletic club/team/league? Are you currently dealing with an injury which might impact your training and competition schedule?

Part 2 - Interview Questions

History of competitive sport participation through the life course

1. How would you describe your experience with sport and physical activity in general?
2. What are some factors that you feel were influential in you becoming involved?
3. At any time in your life, were you unable to participate in sport, or in the sport of your choice? If so, can you explain how this might have impacted your life?
4. If you had to stop competing, what would you miss the most about sport competition?

Benefits of sport and competition

5. Can you describe any benefits (physical, mental, social) that you obtain through training for and competing in sport?
6. Are these different from the benefits you obtain from playing for fun with friends, or participating in other activities?
7. What do you consider your greatest incentive(s) to competing in sports?
8. Do you have friends who share your love of sport and/or competition?
9. Would you recommend sport participation to other adults like you (i.e., retired and in a similar health condition and age group) but who do not currently engage in sport?
   If yes – What would you say to encourage them to participate?
   If no – Why not?
10. What would you say to other adults like you (i.e., retired, in a similar health condition and age group) who already play a sport but are on the fence about taking part in competitive events?

Challenges of sport and competition

11. What would you identify as the biggest challenge(s) to sport participation for you today?
12. What would you identify as the key facilitators to your staying involved in sports?
13. In your opinion, how could sport participation become more inclusive…for retirees specifically?

Perspectives on aging

14. What does aging well mean/represent for you?
15. How would you say that aging affects you as an athlete?

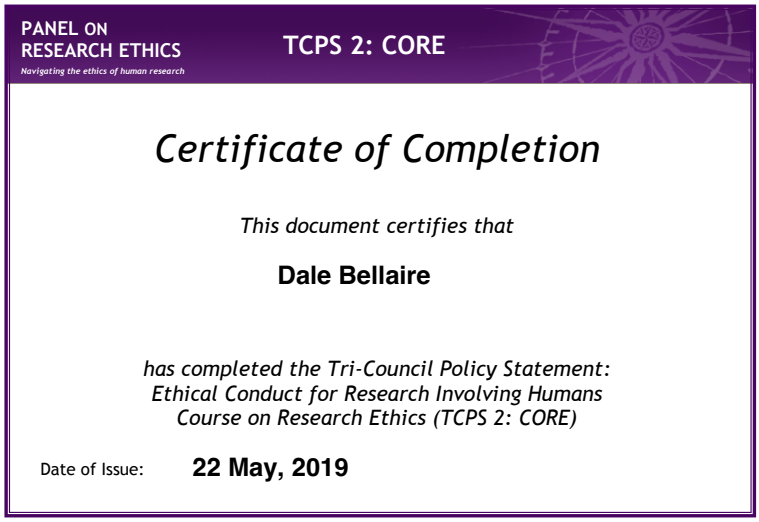
Perspectives on retirement

16. How would you describe your level of activity today? Is this different from when you were working full time?
17. What has been your biggest challenge since retiring?
18. What do you miss about working?
19. Can you describe to me any losses you might have associated with the end of your career?
20. How has participation in sport filled some of your needs since retiring?
21. What type of regular activity in your life has sport replaced since retiring (active commuting (bike, run), gym at work location, work sport team participation)?
22. How has your interest and level of participation changed since retiring?
23. Describe your sense of wellbeing prior to and since retiring?

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me that we have not already discussed?

(Do you have any questions for me?)

Appendix D: TCPS CORE Certificate



PANEL ON RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Dale Bellaire

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: **22 May, 2019**

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME:	Dale Ashley Bellaire
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