

The Process of Perspective: The Art of Living Well in the World of Elite Sport

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Abstract

The demands and pressures of elite sport can result in lives that become unbalanced or out of perspective. However, there are examples of athletes who seem to transcend these challenges and maintain positive relationships with their families, friends, and community. They conduct themselves with humility and grace, and perform admirably both in and out of their sport arenas. This study is an investigation into the lives of some of these exemplars. Through a series of interviews, we attempted to shed some light on the process through which these athletes live and perform.

Using a grounded theory approach, a model of *perspective* was developed. The insights of eleven elite athletes fit into three main categories: defining the self, living authentically, and experiencing fully. Interview quotations lend powerful testimony to the notion that an elite athlete can excel in the sport environment while maintaining a healthy view of self, staying true to self and key others, and finding meaning and fulfillment in the journey. These findings provide a holistic model of healthy living to the elite performer.

Introduction

Many of the issues faced by athletes relate not to specific performance challenges, but rather to difficulties of a more basic nature. In counselling athletes, much time is spent helping individuals relate better to coaches and teammates as people, not just as athletes. Others are helped to stay connected and intimate with significant others, friends, and family who were not immersed in the same performance environment. Many teams and individual athletes are engaged in dialogue about the personal meanings that they draw from their experiences in sport, helping them to stay motivated, deal with fears, and process the powerful emotions associated with success and failure. Still others are asked to place sport within the broader context of their whole lives, in an effort to avoid reliance solely upon their identities as athletes. It is through attention to this basic human foundation, that we have termed “*perspective*”, that athletes seem best able to survive and thrive in the demanding and often brutal environment of elite sport.

However, to date, perspective has not been clearly defined. This study was designed to paint a clearer picture of perspective, its components, and its implications. We were not seeking to describe perspective as a construct, but rather as a process of considerable complexity.

The word perspective suggests some awareness of the self in relation to others as well as certain aspects of the self in relation to other parts and the whole person. The use of the term implies a respect for all aspects of life, without focusing solely on one. The subjective component of the definition indicates relevance of personal values, and the meaning attached to different aspects of one's life. It was thought that perspective

might be a process of keeping the most basic and valuable aspects of one's life front and center, thereby managing one's world in order to stay meaningfully engaged with one's sport, the important people in one's life, and one's self as a whole.

A related concept is ‘balance’ as examined by Amirault and Orlick (1998). Athletes defined balance as staying true to a vision or goal and striving towards it or as respecting different parts of their lives. The study identified some conditions necessary for achieving balance, including making a conscious decision to have balance, having strong self-discipline, enjoying what you are doing, having a support network, respecting leisure time, and being in the moment. While the focus of the study was on fitting one's sport and other important pursuits into one's life, there were data that hinted at a more primary process of finding meaning in one's sport, identity, and relationships, and assigning value to these different domains. The current study explored the process of this meaning-making.

A review of the literature regarding the psychological difficulties of athletes highlights some of the challenges that the athlete may face. Studies identify issues with stress, anxiety, and burnout (Feigley, 1984; Heyman, 1986; Lopiano & Zotos, 1992; Parham, 1993; Raedeke, 1997), identity (Curry & Weaner, 1987; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), relationships (Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Heyman, 1986), and retirement (Blinde & Strata, 1992; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997; Kleiber, Green-dorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987; Sparkes, 1998). But the current study was designed to take a positive focus.

There are numerous examples of individuals who excel in sport and still maintain positive relationships with family, significant others, and the community (such as Wayne Gretzky or Catriona Lemay-Doan). Some individuals are well rounded athletically, intellectually, professionally, and personally. Some are able to maintain healthy conceptions of self, independent of success or failure in sport.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore elite athletes' experiences with respect to perspective. Those factors that contribute to or detract from a *state* of perspective were examined and a model of the *process* was developed. It is hoped that the insights from the current study will provide guidance for athletes, coaches, friends, family, and professionals working in this environment.

Repeat interviews were conducted with eleven elite athletes (six male, five female) who were recruited by professionals in the sport psychology consulting field. These professionals were asked to identify athletes who were top performers but also appeared to 'have it all together/have gotten it all together'. *Elite athletes* were defined as having competed at the amateur national or international level or in the professional or semi-professional ranks. The initial interview was as non-directive as possible in order to reduce the likelihood that we would direct the participants towards the assumptions that we have about the nature of perspective. Each participant was asked the following question: "*As a researcher in this area, I'm aware of the incredible demands and challenges that the elite athlete faces. I'd like you to tell me how you have managed to cope and thrive while you've been involved in high level sport. Please feel free to discuss anything that you view as relevant to you and your life as an athlete.*" All other questions asked in the first interview were

intended to clarify points being made or help participants to articulate them further. Subsequent interviews were more directive as emergent categories and patterns were being tested. The analysis itself followed the coding protocol as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Based on the first analysis, questions were designed to develop the emergent categories further, to test hypotheses about relationships between categories, and to test the trustworthiness of the initial model against the perceptions of the participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym for the purpose of confidentiality. The next section provides a condensed description of the process of perspective identified in this study. For a complete description of the study, its findings, their implications, and their relevance to other literature, see Brown (2001).

The Process of Perspective

The model of perspective has three primary categories: defining the self, living authentically, and experiencing fully (see Figure 1). Each of these categories is influenced by the other two, as is indicated by the two-way arrows. Each category has a set of subcategories that further elaborate on the main category. The subcategories are described in terms of their defining patterns. Each pattern is expressed in terms of two polarities: positive (+) and negative (-). The overriding category of perspective can be thought of as an overall tendency/movement towards the positive polarities of the subcategory patterns. However, it is important to note that these participants were selected as 'exemplars', and it should not be assumed that all athletes will experience this shift towards perspective over the course of their careers.

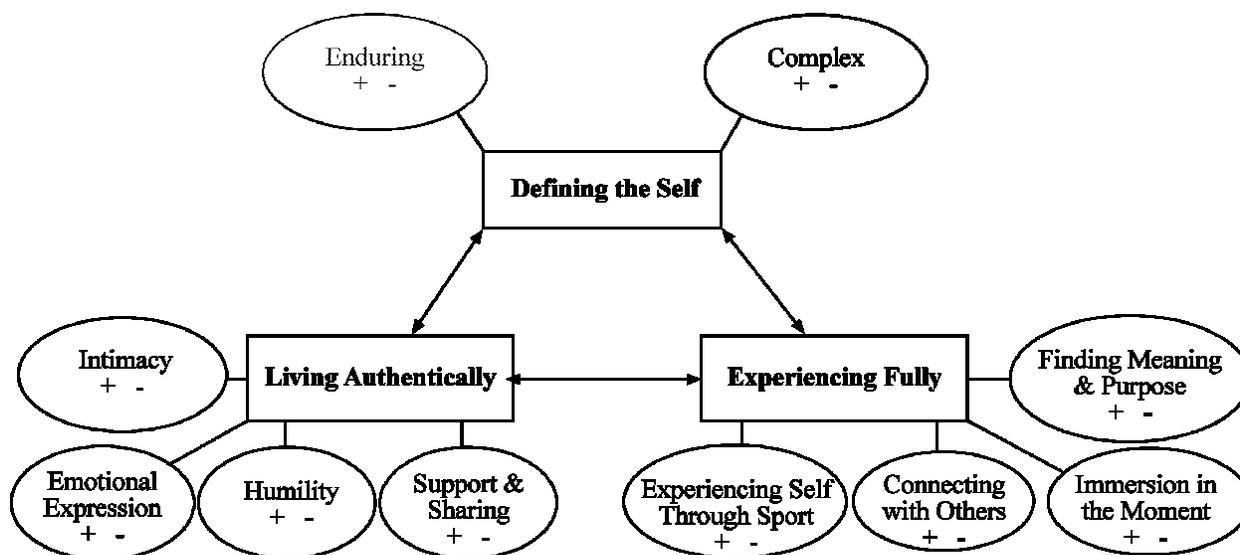
Defining the Self

How one defines the self is of primary importance to the process. Individuals who are able to see themselves as having enduring attributes that cut across activities are able to find value in the self more consistently than those whose self-definitions hinge on sport involvement and outcomes. A sense of personal complexity provides a buffer for setbacks in any given relationship or pursuit, in

contrast to simplistic, unidimensional views of the self. These distinctions help to alleviate pressure and preserve a sense of self and personal value in the face of setbacks and transitions.

Participants viewed the self as distinct from any given activity in which they engaged. The subcategory used to describe this distinction is *the enduring self*.

Figure 1. The process of perspective.



The Enduring Self

It was important to the athletes to separate their value as a person from their results in the competitive arena. Rather than being defined by their sports, individuals valued attributes in themselves that would endure independent of sport.

CASSIE: *I think, in terms of my worth, I think I look at my attributes as a person. What I have. And I try to look at it, not necessarily based on successes, I mean, I think that's part of it, in terms of what I gained, but I think more so qualities are what determine my worth. And I think my qualities*

will compute to whether I get a job, or whether I can make the team, or whatever. And so that will reflect back on my qualities. But I think I try to maintain, in terms of where I am, the qualities that I have.

The self is seen as distinct from any given role that the individual takes on.

CASSIE: *I have a number of roles, like the athlete, or the student, or the friend, or whatever, but I don't see myself as being defined by those things. I think I bring attributes to those things. And so that's where my self comes out in everything I do. Versus*

it's me as the athlete. Like when I'm introduced, I don't really announce what I do. But I define myself more by my personality characteristics and the consistencies within. I: So you wear a lot of different hats but always on the same head.

CASSIE: *Yeah, exactly.*

This view of the self brings with it an implied resilience.

MEAGHAN: *I always think of it as, if all of a sudden, on the way home, I got hit by a car and my legs were broken, or something happened, my world doesn't fall apart. You know, maybe I think of things in a drastic way, but I could go on. I still have everything that makes me up.*

Another athlete alludes to an intrinsic value that each of us has, simple by being human.

SCOTT: *I've said this a few times; a person's identity isn't what they do, or where they live, or what their education level is, or whatever it may be. That's not you. I think people are much more valuable than what they accomplish. And people are intrinsically much more valuable than that. And I think you're created for much more than being a good athlete, or being a good student, or being the head of a major company, or whatever it is. You have much more value than that. It's not about things. It's about who you are inside.*

Greater emphasis was also placed on the value that people add to the lives of those around them, rather than value by virtue of athletic achievement. A tie is made between positive attributes and the value one adds to the lives of others.

RILEY: *I think what makes a great person is just someone who enjoys being alive,*

enjoys living everyday and takes advantage of the things around him, the people around him, and really cares for people in his community, and his friends. And I've always been a person who depends a lot on friends and I've also tried to be a good friend.

This value distinction appears to be closely linked to a separation of one's identity from athletic results. In other words, the way individuals defined themselves far exceeded any event or accomplishment. In addition, events in the athletic realm do not dictate change in the essence of the individual.

MEAGHAN: *You know, people said "oh, you must be going through a post-Olympic depression" but obviously some people go through that, but I think they only go through that if they have the perspective that the Olympics are everything in their life. Because if you put everything on it, and it's over, what else do you have? Where I don't look at the Olympics as that. Yeah, you know, people get to know your name, they get to know your face. Whether that means going into broadcasting, whether that means sponsors, those things, I mean golf tournaments, people you get to meet. There are things that you can do with an Olympic gold medal, but I think when you look at it, that doesn't change the person. It changes the opportunities, but it has to be something else that moulds your life.*

Once the conditional value is let go, a celebration of the self can occur.

MIKAELA: *Now I accept who I am, and kind of just revel in it. You know, I always thought that when I did something, or when I accomplished this or that, then I'd be this really incredible person. And now it's like "no, I'm already an incredible person, regardless of what I accomplish". You know,*

the way that I look at my life, the way that I treat other people, the way that I interact with people, and the way that I do the things that I like doing, and the love that I have for everything that I do, that's what makes me who I am.

Reference is made to the kind of panic response that can occur when athletes start to struggle in their sports.

SCOTT: *I think that when people get caught up in seeing themselves only as what they've done, what they've accomplished, then when they start have bad results I think it leads them to make nasty choices. I think that that's where there's a lot of danger in sport or in work or in anything else in life. If you see yourself as a lawyer, and that's what defines you, and you're nothing outside of being a lawyer, you get your self-worth from it, what happens if you're sued for something and it is actually your fault and you cost a corporation a huge amount of money and you get fired? Where does that put you? You know? Your world is destroyed. And that's a pretty dangerous place to be, I think. I think, ultimately, everyone is unique and multi-faceted.*

This separation was viewed as critical to the full enjoyment of one's sport and life and the ability to cope with setbacks.

MIKAELA: *When I first got started, even when I went to my first Olympics, everything was so serious, and you equate everything you do with how good of a person that you are. And after a while I just figured that's all bunk. I mean, you are who you are and nobody's perfect, and yet when you get into the public eye or you get around other individuals, they feel that you should be put up on this pedestal or that you should be more than who you are. And when I was that way, I found that I had this really negative drive,*

like everything had to be done and it was a must, and I drove myself and I worked hard, and you couldn't take a day off because if you did you'd fall behind and stuff. And then, when I didn't make 96, it was like "wait a minute, that's not the way I want to live my life". I don't want to end up in an early grave or end up really jaded too soon because I found that after 96 I lost the drive for sport. And so I found that I kind of had to change or learn a little bit more about me and separate me from the athlete. And once I did that, I started kind of just exploring and going through the things that made me me, like the things that I liked to do, the things that I liked to do outside of sport, my other interests and things.

A peacefulness can develop in individuals who are accepting of the self.

RACHEL: *Athletes that are very graceful in defeat and victory, in everyday training, in their lives, I think they're just happier people, happier with themselves, more at peace with everything that's going on around them, more at peace with where they're at in their relationships, in their sport. And I believe this for myself, you just really have to take a step outside of your little bubble and put everything into perspective. I say 'perspective' lots because our sport psychologist really engrained it in our brain (laughs). I don't know if everybody picked up on it but for me it's just so vitally important and I really feel that once you have that, it kind of makes everything not such a big deal, you know, and you can just kind of go with the flow. You know, if you're happy with yourself, I think that doing well is like a bonus in everything you do. And doing poorly is just another life lesson. And that's why I think people are a lot more graceful. They're just happier people. They're a lot more content with themselves and where they're at in life.*

And this philosophy can feed one's passion for the sport, enjoying it in and of itself.

SCOTT: *I think the athletes that need to be successful never find true enjoyment in sport. That's my personal opinion on that. I think that when you realize that what you do on the track or do on the field or whatever doesn't really determine who you are, or doesn't really affect who you are, and you're doing it because you enjoy it, you may be good at it, those are the reasons you're doing it. You're not doing it to get money or to get feedback or whatever else.*

In summary, the self is seen as having value independent of athletic performance. Individuals recognized personal attributes that they possess regardless of their involvement in sport, as well as a quality of interaction with others that added to their sense of value.

Complexity

Complexity is the second subcategory in defining the self. Individuals viewed themselves as multi-faceted. This broadened idea of the self provides balance in response to success and failure in any given facet of one's life.

Athletes could recall times when they defined themselves unidimensionally.

CASSIE: *We went to the (Olympic) qualifier and we were one team away from making it. I came home and that was probably the worst point in my life ever, because I put everything towards this goal. You know, make the Olympics, then I was just gonna train and then I'd decide what I wanted to do with my life. So I got back in November and was completely empty. So from November to ... it took a good three or four months, and even that was scrambling to try and find what it was that I could do to make*

me feel like a person, to feel like I'm worthy, or those kinds of things. So that took a while.

But these athletes discovered that a multi-dimensionality was critical for living fully and providing emotional balance.

MEAGHAN: *I heard Reggie White say this and I totally agree ... It should never be who you are instead of what you do. And you know that's ... I think ultimately that would be the one thing I would say about sport is that it's great for now and yet you have to be able to move outside of sport and do other things and have another life really.*

One athlete maintained that attention to other pursuits and relationships is vital to the pursuit of personal excellence.

RILEY: *Well I think you come to a certain level and I think the way my whole life has been structured, I've always made sacrifices for the game, but it hasn't been the end all thing. I've always wanted to improve my hockey, but I always wanted to have my education too to fall back on. I've always wanted to go to the best place to be to improve my game of hockey, but I've always kept in touch of my relationships with my parents and my friends back home to make sure that those relationships continue to grow, and that hockey doesn't shut them right off. And I think we dedicate a lot of our lives to improving as individuals, as a pro athlete, but the bottom line is you work at this game, on a game day you'll probably play the game of hockey for 2 ½ hours in the evening and maybe an hour in the morning. And then on your off days, you're practicing for an hour and maybe weights for an hour, so there's two hours. Well there's a lot more time in the day for other things, and it needs to be filled up with other things. And*

if you don't have those relationships and friendships, what are you going to turn to?

A philosophy of holistic development procures spaces for multiple dimensions in one's life.

RILEY: *I think you still need to be a well-rounded person, maybe not in your athletic endeavours, but in your life endeavours. And whether it's through education or just through reading, some type of education, whether it's going to school and taking classes or reading books, or just like picking up a newspaper every day, have a life outside of the game. I think what helped me out so much at college is that when education wasn't going well, I could fall back on hockey, and say "look, things are going well at the rink, I'm having a lot of fun there and doing well there". If things weren't going so well at the rink, maybe we lost a couple of games, I could say "well look at my GPA, I feel like I'm developing a good rapport with my teachers and I'm enjoying my classes", and they balanced each other out. And then you add another dimension of the relationship with your friends and family. They were always there to be supportive and to help you through things.*

The importance of experiences outside of sport to foster a sense of complexity and depth is highlighted.

MEAGHAN: *When I moved to (name of city), it was hard because I was 17 and I'd just finished high school and I was pretty timid when I came here, and so I thought if I know some speedskaters, I'll live with them. And my mom really wanted me to live in residence, because for her it was very important that I had friends outside of skating. And I mean that just comes back to she didn't want my life to be skating. Because to her that was scary. And I think that was the*

best thing she did. Because within a week I knew so many people outside of sport, and I would say my closest friends don't do sports just because it's what you do but ... I mean it's sort of an escape when you can get away from your sport, and I guess have a view from another perspective.

These out of sport experiences are seen as important buffers for setback, allowing athletes to step out of their sport worlds when the frustrations and disappointments are overwhelming. Observations about athletes without such buffers reinforce their importance.

JORDAN: *But not qualifying for the Olympics this time. I've been to two previous Olympic qualifiers but this time I wouldn't say we expected it but there was the potential to. After we lost to Poland, you know, I was very upset. (Close friend and teammate) came up to me and said "it's been a pleasure playing with you" and as soon as he said that, it was just total waterworks. And that was very, very difficult for me. But I know a lot of guys on the team are really messed up about it still. And I think it's because they didn't really have a whole lot else going on. And I think that's kind of what we're speaking about here. And I know people that, for that reason aren't doing that well with it.*

Alternative pursuits and activities seem to alleviate a 'heaviness' associated with taking one's sport home.

RACHEL: *I think I used to take all those things so seriously. I'd get so caught up in it. If I did badly, I was so upset. And you know, if I did well I was happy. But it was such a huge, huge focus, like tunnel vision, that was it. And I think in the last two or three years especially, I've really tried to, when I'm done my work at school, I kind of*

try to leave it there. Especially if it's a bad day. You just leave it there, go home, enjoy my friends, enjoy my family, you know, my fiancé, it's something fresh to look forward to, getting married. Like those are sort of the things that I use outside of diving to keep myself distracted and you know, some kind of stimulation that's not sport.

Implications for transition are implied. Retirement is a loss, but not a loss of one's entire experiential spectrum.

MEAGHAN: *Of course, you know, people say it's hard to retire, and I think it is. You'll miss it but you'll miss it probably until the day you die. But just because you'll miss it doesn't mean that there aren't other things that you can do in life.*

An underlying philosophy of personal complexity and a celebration of that characteristic was expressed.

MIKAELA: *I think the whole thing is the idea of self-discovery and realizing that you're more than one dimension. You know, realizing that being an athlete is a huge part of who you are in the moment, but it's not all of who you are. I've learned that I'm not just an athlete. I'm an artist and a singer and a poet and a business person, and all these things, and also I'm a person who can go out with friends or be a recluse, and I can respond to all sorts of different situations. All the pieces fill the puzzle of self-discovery. And I think sport should be more of a way of developing, and a way of growing, and a way of discovering what your overall talents are. You know, discovering that you're really determined, or you are able to fight back from adversity. That's what competitive athletics is for.*

INTERVIEWER: *"If I asked you to define yourself, what would you say?"*

SCOTT: *"I couldn't do it. I'm too complex. And I think anybody who tried to would be shorting themselves. I think human beings are just too complex to be defined."*

One of the main ways in which this complexity was evident was in a dichotomy of the self that most of the athletes had established and grown comfortable with. They perceived two distinct parts of the self, each allowing them to experience an important mode of living. While this may seem anti-thetical to the concept of an 'enduring self', arguably the self can be enduring but multi-modal.

JORDAN: *I have, it's almost like, a Jeckyl & Hyde kind of personality. In the water, I'm one of the most competitive people you'll ever meet. You've seen it in me, like I will do everything in my power to win, within the realm of the rules to a certain degree. And then there's the relaxed, like I have no problem sitting on the couch and watching some CFL, or watching a movie or whatever, just relaxing, going out with some friends and just laughing, like I'm not a competitive person outside the sporting realm, not a terribly competitive person, like to the point where everything has to be a competition. In the water, in the athletic realm, I'm very competitive. I don't like to lose. I never have been a big fan of losing. But I'm certainly more laid back outside the sporting realm.*

One cannot help but be reminded of the Yin and the Yang of Chinese dualistic philosophy.

RILEY: *I think I'd say that I'm an individual who's very goal oriented, who when I focus in on something that I want to achieve then I'll work extremely hard to achieve that. I'm a person who is well-rounded, who knows what's going on in the world around*

him. He's focused on his goals but is also educated in things that are happening all over this world, and especially that are affecting the people around him. And a person who, when he's not striving for those goals is very humorous, I guess, or lighthearted, doesn't take things as seriously, enjoys just relaxing, enjoys the simple things like T.V. and just hanging out with his friends and enjoying relaxing time. So I think he's pretty much two different people: He's an intense, goal-driven individual at times, and he's extremely relaxed and at ease with the world at other times. There's sometimes not the in-between stage. There's one or the other.

Public and social influences can make transition from 'sport-mode' to 'non-sport-mode' challenging, necessitating conscious efforts to maintain the sport-self/non-sport-self distinction.

CHRIS: *Actually, when I get away from the rink, I try to pretend that I'm not a hockey player. I just try to go about my business and be normal. I think the more you put yourself in the position of being special, the more you want to believe it. I don't want to be in those situations when I'm away from the rink. When I'm at the rink, that's fine, people want to be around. But when I'm away from the rink, I just try to get myself away and come home and do stuff with my son and with my wife, and go out and do normal things, just go out and walk around the mall, just little things that make me feel like I'm more than hockey. And that way I don't have to worry too much about the game. It kind of stays at the rink.*

To summarize, the athletes in this study defined the 'self' in certain distinct ways.

- One's personal value is seen as a product one's attributes and the

value that one adds to the experiences of others, rather than being contingent upon sport outcomes. This implies an experience of self that transcends any given pursuit, whereby the essential elements of each individual stay intact regardless of outcomes.

- The individual is seen as complex and multi-faceted. One can experience two (or more) distinct sides of the self, in and out of sport. Different relationships, pursuits, interests, and activities provide emotional balance in spite of the disruption of any one component of the self.

These perceptions of the self allow the athlete to experience failure, frustration, and transition without threatening the enduring 'self'.

By contrast, perspective can be lost through the tendency to define oneself and one's value through sport and performance outcomes, and to view oneself unidimensionally and in oversimplified terms.

The 'perspective end' view of the self frees the individual to experience the self *through one's activities*, rather than being defined by them and drawing personal value from them. This philosophy of the self cuts across subsequent sections and is a central piece of the perspective process.

Living Authentically

The second of the primary categories in the model is *living authentically* (see Figure 1). When individuals define themselves in enduring ways and non-contingent terms, acceptance of the self for what it really is becomes easier. A recurring priority in the lives of these athletes involves the freedom to be themselves. The interviews reflect an

importance of being able to project a self that is congruent with the ‘real self’, not just outwardly but inwardly as well. This basic notion provides the foundation for the second main category: living authentically. The basic idea of authentic living was captured more explicitly in a small set of quotes. The subcategories of intimacy, emotional expression, humility, and support & sharing complete the category. Authenticity carries with it a sensation of freedom, as described by this athlete.

I: You said your family allows you to be free. What do you mean by free?

COURTNEY: *Well, as I said earlier, I’m kind of this person where you get what you get with me. Sometimes I’m too direct maybe, but I’d rather be like that and speak my mind, and to me that’s being free. It’s just being who I am, and as I said, if I’m in a good mood you see it, if I’m in a bad mood you can see it, and that’s what I mean by free. You get what you get with me, and that’s how it is. You know, that group of mine, family and friends and my husband, they let me ‘be’ in good and bad times.*

This freedom is enhanced when one is able to focus on the obligation of being true to oneself, rather than how others are responding.

SCOTT: *“When you’re comfortable with yourself and what you’re doing, and you realize that who you are isn’t what you’re doing, I think you can be authentic with people.”*

Authenticity involves the removal of false representations of the self, or “no illusions” as one participant succinctly put it.

CHRIS: *I try to be the same person throughout any situation, whether it’s at the*

rink or away from the rink. I don’t think I’m too much of a different person when I get into different situations. I don’t want to try to fool anybody into thinking I’m something different than I am. The way I feel about myself is probably the way I want other people to feel about me also. Um, basically, just a hard-working, honest, you kind of get what you see kind of thing. There’s no illusions. Pretty humble. Pretty even-keeled. You know, a very honest, hard-working guy that showed up to play every night. And that’s probably how I’d want people to remember me.

This includes accepting fallibility in order to take responsibility for one’s actions.

COURTNEY: *It’s more than just public scrutiny too, because sometimes I think that when you look in the mirror, sometimes you don’t like what you see. Maybe you’ve reacted in a certain way in a certain situation and you know you’re better than that. If you don’t have to be infallible, then if you had a bad day, then you can take responsibility and ownership of it. Because you’re not perfect all the time. It’s too hard.*

Intimacy

An important part of living authentically is having close relationships in which one feels safe to be fully oneself. While the world of elite sport can be highly conditional, fickle, and intolerant of weakness in any form, these participants paint a picture of intimacy that appears to balance the sport world realities. When a significant other fully accepts the individual, the defenses can be dropped, providing a heightened level of comfort, safety, and genuineness. A safe forum to express, without being judged, appears to offer the individual both safety and strength.

COURTNEY: *And I know that I need to have him there for me to stay healthy, and it*

gives me the strength to do it. But having a place to go and just unload and be in a bad mood if I want to be in a bad mood, or be in a good mood if I want to be, and he let's me do that. It's okay. He doesn't judge me. And I think, you know, those are the people you want in your life. And I have a couple of other really close friends. So I definitely have this circle or network that are there for me.

While one can be resistant to opening up, ultimately the experience is a positive one when one is fully accepted.

RACHEL: *It's so important to have that support network. And I think it's something that I started off, at the beginning of my athletic career, not understanding. It was there but I didn't take advantage of it. So I'm not afraid to show my moments of weakness, I think. I'm getting better at letting other people see that side of me. I don't have to be the tough guy all the time.*

I: So ironically, in accepting that vulnerability in yourself, has it made you a stronger person?

RACHEL: *I think so. Yeah, I feel I am. But if you asked me that 4 or 5 years ago, I would have said "no way, you're such a baby", you know, and that's the truth. That's how I feel about it now. I feel needy sometimes. That's what the word is. And I don't like feeling needy. Even now, it still bugs me sometimes. But you know, I just realized it's human nature to want affection or to want to be understood, and I shouldn't think that that's such a bad thing if it's in me.*

Complete openness and acceptance of vulnerability seems to be critical to full intimacy.

SCOTT: *She's a big part of my whole 'keeping things in balance'. We're best friends, like we talk all the time. Like, we can still sit down, if I'm on a road trip, I can sit on the phone and talk to her for like two hours, you know, which is really cool still. And I think that's important. We can gab about a lot of things, and there is absolutely nothing of significance in my life that she doesn't know. She knows everything. Like, the worst things I've ever done, and like everything. And I know everything about her. We don't keep anything from each other. We don't believe in that. We don't believe in separating anything. We work together.*

I: So you can be completely vulnerable with her?

SCOTT: *Absolutely.*

Significant others have the power to give license to feel emotions fully and to accept this vulnerability.

MEAGHAN: *I think that's exactly what I said. If your relationships are based on sport and not more than that, then there's no intimacy because that's all that makes you up. And then you really can't be open. You know, if people only have a relationship with you based on what you do or how good you are at something, then you obviously can't share your fears with them. If somebody thinks you're great in a sport and you go "man, am I ever scared", they'll think "woah, you aren't who I thought you were".*

Accepting vulnerability may be particularly challenging for males, due to societal expectations. But the payoffs are significant.

CHRIS: *I think over the years, we've been married four years now, and I think I'm slowly starting to try to get her involved a little bit in it and tell her more, just so that maybe she can help me out with it and so that she kind of feels a part of it also. Earlier on it was probably more just trying to hide it from her and coming home and putting on the false front of everything's okay. But she's a smart person too, and she can see right through that. So I've been trying to more lately as we go with everything, not just hockey but absolutely anything, is try to talk more and tell her more about the way I'm feeling, and then she can help me get through it.*

I: *What kind of difference has that made for you?*

CHRIS: *It not only makes your marriage a little bit better if you can share absolutely everything and there are no secrets, you know, I don't sit up in bed and just fume and worry about the next game or what happened in the last game. It's easier to get it off your chest. And it seems like once you get it off your chest and actually talk to someone about it, there's no problem anymore. It's amazing, once you do it, how it kind of just takes care of itself.*

In short, having a significant other with which one could be completely open and feel completely accepted appears to break down some of the potential isolation inherent in elite sport, as well as providing refuge from the demands of elite sport.

Emotional Expression

The second subcategory of living authentically is the importance of emotional expression. These athletes all recognize the value of emotional awareness and expressing one's emotions in some way. Rather than seeing this as a sign of weakness, they refer

to it as a healthy practice that can enhance one's experiences.

Accepting and expressing one's emotions may represent the ultimate step in being authentic with oneself. The emotions can be seen as one's best indicator of what's most important to oneself and what lies within.

COURTNEY: *For me, my emotions reflect what's most important to me. That's how I live. And sometimes it's too much for people. But that's who I am and I'm okay with that. And for me, to suppress some of those things, which I had to do, it's not good. Like, for me, it's just not healthy. So I'm a big believer in that. You know, because you can only grow from that.*

Expressing in the moment simply becomes part of being oneself, being authentic.

MIKAELA: *You know, bad throw, you say whatever you have to say, it comes out, and then you go back in and you can refocus. And I've found it's so much healthier to say what you have to say in the moment rather than holding it in. And some athletes are really good at that while others are too worried about what happens on the outside. And I'm finding now that it has to be a happy medium, a happy balance. You know, just bring who you are to wherever it is you're going.*

Accepting and expressing one's emotions is seen as good 'economics of energy'.

COURTNEY: *And I think that if you can be open and be yourself with those people (supporters), it helps you to re-energize too. You know, you get that from those people. You know, that's not my motive in being with them, but by getting it out there and releasing it and whether you figure it out or*

you don't, it's out, and for some reason, you feel re-energized.

However, these lessons can take years to learn and accept. Individuals slowly discover the function of expressing rather than internalizing emotions.

RACHEL: *I think I just know better now to let it go. And just to let it go because you waste so much energy being upset about something that, in most cases, isn't a big deal. But the more you think about it, and the more you let yourself boil, it just becomes bigger and bigger, it just snowballs. And that's totally yourself making a bigger deal of it than it is. And that's what my family tells me, the people closest to me are just like "you know what, let it go. It's never as bad as you think. Just don't worry about it. Tomorrow is a new day." And I think, at this point in my athletic career, I've been doing the sport long enough that if you have one bad day you go home and have a sleep and the next day you come back and feel refreshed. You know, it's not like if you have one bad day at practice you've lost the dives or the technique forever. Sometimes you have bad days.*

And sometimes human contact, even without words, can convey shared burden and lessen the load.

RACHEL: *Sometimes a hug is just the only thing you can do, you know, you can't even talk. That's the only thing that can make you feel better. It kind of feels nice, you feel like you have a weight lifted off your shoulders when you can share it with somebody else, even if you don't even talk about it, just that they know you're feeling off.*

The need can even be less about finding solutions, and more about just 'being heard'.

CHRIS: *And once you get it off your chest, it just seems like there's a big weight that's been weighing you down the whole time and she can help you deal with it if you have to deal with it more, and if it's just something that's been bothering you, then it just seems like it's not a problem anymore once you actually say it.*

Individuals recognize the dangers of keeping their emotions bottled up.

COURTNEY: *Yeah. I would have liked to have done that more (expressed feelings openly), and I don't know if that's an age thing, or if when you're in sport longer, you learn more about yourself. I think it's a combination of all of those things. But at times, I think at the beginning of the interview here I said I kept some things inside and only showed certain things. It drove me nuts inside. It's not good for me. It may have been good for my teammate but it's not healthy. That's what I learned.*

I: *It's inauthentic.*

COURTNEY: *Yeah, totally. But sometimes people can't handle that. And sometimes it's better not to say anything. I do believe that. But you don't want to be doing that on a regular basis or you'll kill your spirit.*

Ultimately, the emotions can be tapped as a source of energy and passion for pursuing one's sport and other activities. The emotions are not allowed to 'run amuck', but rather are 'harnessed' and directed constructively.

SCOTT: *Some guys just lose control, you know, and blow up for no reason. You see it in athletes, you see it in coaches, and other things. Yeah, you've got to harness some of those anxieties and even some of the frustrations that you bring from the office to the*

track once in a while, you know, and use them. Sometimes I think, if used properly, they can cause the body physiologically to get into a fight or flight mentality, you can possibly use that to your benefit. But you don't let any of your emotions sort of take over and dictate what you do. I think ultimately you've got to be in some sort of control. You can't let them run wild. But I think that if you use them, you can benefit from them. I use Christian worship music to warm up because it just makes me happy. It gets me into a happy mood, and when I'm happy, I feel better about my jumping. And the last few years, I've jumped best when I'm happy. When I'm just feeling really happy, feeling close to the Lord, and it's almost like a carefree, happy-go-lucky kind of mentality or space that I'm in, and that's where I like to be. And worship music gets me there. It's not typical warm-up music, but it works for me because I know the type of feel that I want when I'm competing.

So the acceptance and expression of emotions serves multiple functions.

- Staying fully connected to oneself and the things of primary importance.
- Responding to events in a way that allows momentary experience of feelings, in order to get one's head around what has happened, then leaving it in the past and moving on.
- Being authentic with oneself and others, rather than experiencing dissonance between what one feels and what one feels is *acceptable* to feel.
- Accessing energy and motivation to pursue activities fully and passionately.

Humility

The third subcategory of living authentically is humility. Humility goes hand in hand

with one's attempts to project the self as it really is. If individuals wish to be seen (and to see themselves) as a whole package, including the vulnerabilities and weaknesses, then an attitude of humility can help to curb the temptation to project a 'superhuman' image.

Maintaining humility was seen as vitally important to the participants of this study. This attitude is consistent with the idea of separating athletic achievements from one's worth and identity. If we accept that we all have qualities that make us unique and intrinsically valuable, then we should see success as an enjoyable experience, not as a source of entitlement and special treatment. Similarly, we should accept failure as a disappointing experience, not as a compromise of our personal value.

The pedestal on which elite athletes are sometimes placed can create a distance between them and the people around them. Humility allows them to diffuse the separation that might otherwise occur between themselves, as top performers, and these people. They seem attuned to the idea that the most exciting discovery that one can make about an elite athlete is that "she's just a regular person like you or me".

This breakdown of isolation was an experience common to the participants.

***MEAGHAN:** I think humility is one of the most important things, because if I look at (athlete's sport) and, you know, walking into the (name of training venue) and training, the thing I like the most is, when we have training camps, not just with our national team, but with the developmental program teams and all the younger people, and maybe older but who haven't reached the same level, I love that because I don't want them to look at me, I mean, they might look*

up to me in my ability and what I've done, but I want them to look up to me in the way that I don't see myself as any better. Because in training camp, we do events where, this is off the ice, where you become absolutely raw in front of people. I mean you do hill runs where you're on the verge of throwing up, you're on the verge of crying. And if some provincial club athlete is stronger at it than me, well good for them. And you know, if they see me struggling with it and they can say a word of encouragement, I love that, you know, and that's good for me and that's good for them because I need that. And I don't want them to look at me as "I shouldn't say anything because I'm not at her level". I mean, we're at the same level. I might have accomplished something more on the ice but I don't want anybody ever to look at me and say "she thinks she's better because she's done this" because I don't.

At the end of the day, these individuals want to belong, independent of accomplishments.

MEAGHAN: *And so, when I leave the sport, I really think that the most important thing that I want people to look back on is to say "we respected her for how she handled her success". Or my failures, and I didn't sort of want pity when I didn't do well, or I didn't want to be praised when I did well. You know, I just wanted to be one of everybody.*

Again, most fundamentally, the individual should not be changed by success or failure.

MIKAELA: *It (success in sport) doesn't mean that you're any better or you've got a pedestal higher than anybody or you can step on people's heads just because you beat them by a foot or a centimeter or whatever else. What happens in the pool or on the track or on the field happens, and when it's*

done, it's done. And it doesn't mean you're any better or any worse than you were when you stepped on. But if you're successful, you're still an ordinary Joe. You still put your pants on one leg at a time and all that kind of stuff. And you're still the same person that you were before you won, or before you lost, or whenever.

Some athletes are careful not to take credit for their athletic 'gifts'. They attempt to honour their abilities, but do not see them as a source of separation from others. They also acknowledge and value the efforts of those with less natural ability.

MEAGHAN: *I mean, I do believe that it's a gift that I have and I've used it to the best of my ability, but I don't take credit for it. You know, I've done the work but a lot of people can do the work and they just won't be at the top. You know, there are people that work just as hard as me or harder, but they just don't have the natural ability, and that doesn't mean that they're any better or worse than I am.*

Efforts are also taken by some to share achievement with a collective, acknowledging the efforts of many in the performance of one. This again allows the athlete to stay connected with key people within sport.

I: *Did your success change you? And if not, how did you keep that from happening?*

MEAGHAN: *You keep it from happening by how you ultimately view everything. You know, I view an Olympic medal as obtaining a goal. And not just sort of from what I did but collectively all these people helping you. I mean how many years ... I've worked with (exercise physiologist) for ten years, you know, and different coaches, but you can't just go out on the ice and win everything. I mean there's obviously teamwork involved.*

Like, all these people that make your program etc. who are never acknowledged. It's only ever the athlete on the podium who is acknowledged.

Still, when the public response places athletes in a special category, it can create a feeling of separation.

JORDAN: *It's nice to get praise once in a while, but then again, I'm not good at receiving praise. I feel embarrassed by it. I never tell people that I'm on the national team. It's not that I'm embarrassed by it, it's just I think it's like bragging and I'm not big on bragging. I'm not looking to be set apart.*

One athlete was not bothered by the special attention because she felt her key relationships are not affected by it, and ultimately she remains unchanged.

COURTNEY: *I love kids. Most of my friends have them. And, yeah, kids are great. So any time we can do anything to help. They make me feel special too. It's not that ... you know, whether I'm inspiring them, you know, I'd like to think that I am, and that's why they come over, because they've just seen me play and so, yeah, it's a good feeling.*

I: *Do you feel they put you on a pedestal?*

COURTNEY: That's not a bad thing, right? That doesn't change who you are. If people look up to you, you've got a unique gift. That doesn't change who you are and how you live your daily life with the people that matter to you. You know, people are going to have preconceived notions about you and if they think you're a superstar, well, you know, to them, in their eyes you are.

Some see this public response as an opportunity to step onto even ground with others and make them feel special.

CHRIS: *It's kind of cool, because I look back to when I was a kid, and if anybody that was in the position that I'm in now paid any attention to me at all, well I'd remember that forever. So it's kind of fun to be on the other side of it and be able to give back and realize that that kid is in the exact same position that I was in, and I would have loved if he would have given me a pat on the butt and said "good job" or made a little joke with me. I mean, that would have made my year. I still remember some stuff that players that were instructors in hockey schools did for me, and that also made me want to continue to play hockey. So it's kind of fun to be put in that position and be able to help out some other kids.*

Athletes made reference to the role that humility plays in achieving excellence.

SCOTT: *I think you sort of realize that you've been blessed with an ability and you don't take it for granted. There are some athletes that are awesomely talented but they never last very long because as soon as they get to a point where they have to actually put in the time and the effort in order to continue to progress, their pride or whatever kicks in, and they don't want to do that because it always came so easily. And if they had really appreciated the abilities that they had humbly, they would have continued, but they don't. They wanted the quick easy fix, or whatever, and it doesn't quite work that way.*

A distinction can be drawn between 'humble before the cameras' and a lifestyle of humility which was valued by these participants.

SCOTT: *And people say you're supposed to be humble, but it's a false sense of humility. It's humble in front of the media and humble in situations where you're supposed to be, but you can go and talk trash all you want. I think if you're not living a humble lifestyle, if you're not living with an attitude of humility, it's gonna come out. Then there are guys like Wayne Gretzky. He's awesomely talented, you know, best that probably ever played his sport in his position, and you never hear an arrogant word. With twenty-some years of being in the sport, some people like him, some people don't like him, but he never came across like he was better than anyone else. And look how much he's respected for it. Look how much he's progressed the sport for it. You know, I think people appreciate an attitude of humility. People recognize that, and when he goes through his bad times and slumps and things like that, they also protect him.*

In summary, an attitude of humility allows athletes to be more authentic, breaks down isolation between themselves and the general public, and offers additional opportunities to touch the lives of others in a positive way.

Support & Sharing

The last subcategory of living authentically is support and sharing. Like the intimate relationships, the presence of a supportive family and network of friends can further reinforce the individual's ability to express the 'unedited' self. The athletes had considerable reverence for those relationships that were 'real' and unwavering.

The role of family and friends in supporting the elite athlete appears to be a huge one. The participants attributed a great deal of their success, fulfillment, and perspective to the presence of accepting, supportive relationships. In addition, the unconditional

support of these people allowed athletes to share their experiences with their support group, rather than having to prove themselves and their worth.

These relationships seem to reinforce the healthy perception of self that was described in the first section. For instance, separating worth from accomplishment is a recurring theme when these relationships are explored.

COURTNEY: *I think that when our sport psychologist worked with our team before 96, we really talked a lot about perspective, and so I think I had a good feeling or good perspective going into 96. We were there and it was for us, and not because I have to do it for my mom and dad, I don't have to do it for every Canadian that's watching. And try to live that experience. But for this Olympics, because I was in the Olympics and now I'm still fighting for my position to get there, and being where I've been, I'm doing this all for me, but I'm bringing those people along with me. But there are no expectations like "you need to have the gold medal" because in their eyes I am that. And I feel that. And that's the best feeling.*

The importance of this support takes on additional meaning when one articulates the 'nakedness' inherent in athletic performance.

I: *It sounds like you have a group of people, particularly your parents and (significant other), with whom you can be completely vulnerable.*

COURTNEY: *Right.*

I: *And who love you unconditionally.*

COURTNEY: *Right.*

I: *How important is that?*

COURTNEY: *Well that's the ultimate. That's everything to me, because it allows me to be free. You're extremely vulnerable in sport. You know? If you're having a bad day or something in your personal life is going on, how do you hide that or how do you put your armor on? Well, I've been struggling with that for the last little bit, and your play shows it, there's nowhere to hide. And so, knowing that regardless of what's going on, you have that is huge.*

But irrespective of the sport outcomes, support is unwavering.

MEAGHAN: *Um, I mean it was hard (major let down early in career), obviously I needed the support of family. You know, realizing that my family didn't think I was less important. And that's a big thing because I mean you have to decide why you're doing the sport. And I think for most people it's themselves, but also whether they want to succeed because they want people to be proud of them. And I think that's a big thing. You know, and that's human nature. And to have people say to you, "you know, it doesn't matter to us whether you're first or last", you know, really puts things into perspective.*

Parents can also do their athletic offspring a service by taking pride in the accomplishments, whatever they may be.

RICHARD: And I know, even if I don't go to the Olympics or ever get a gold medal at this meet or that meet or break a Canadian record, that they'll always still be very proud of me for what I've accomplished and be able to look up to me and say "that's my brother" and be proud to talk about me.

It is worth noting that these athletes had experiences with their parents that were characterized by a level of freedom to discover their passion, rather than having pur-

suits imposed on them by overzealous parents.

COURTNEY: *My parents let me explore and learn. And sometimes I'm going to make a wrong choice, but that's okay because you learn from those things. That's exactly how I've been brought up and I think that's why I'm able to live in this world and do what I do, because they've let me experience the good, the bad, and the ugly, and sure they've made some suggestions along the way, but basically they've just sort of let me go and they never had any tight reigns on me to stop me from experiencing or developing who I am.*

The outside relationships (parents, family, friends) provide a sense of security and stability that may be badly needed by the athlete.

SCOTT: *I've got a pretty good support network from my wife and close friends. I know a lot of people but I don't have very many close friends. I have a small group of really close friends that I can talk to about pretty much anything. And I think that brings a lot of balance and security to my life. If I'm going through pretty much anything I can make a couple of phone calls and I'll have people to talk with and, in a lot of cases, to pray with. And you probably know it's very therapeutic just getting the thing off your chest, just talking about it and getting it off your chest. And having someone there that's actually listening, and having someone there that you know cares about you, you know, almost as much as you care about yourself, it's nice.*

The support of key individuals can also help in enduring those conditions that might otherwise seem unbearable, in order to stay the course of greatest importance to that athlete.

JORDAN: *I've always been very close to my parents. (Name of significant other) is very important to me, obviously. So again, I've surrounded myself with good people that are always going to look after me, like the team sport psychologist. If I ever need anything I can talk to him and he won't tell me, he'll listen and help me choose the right way. But again, I've been privileged to surround myself with good people that will help me keep my feet on the ground and hopefully on the right course.*

Given this unconditional support, it should not come as a surprise that these individuals had a desire to share their athletic experiences with their supporters, rather than using them as an opportunity to prove their worth, and perform for them. In other words, when one's esteem from others is not riding on athletic outcomes, this provides a freedom to experience the sport and to share that experience with those people who are closest.

COURTNEY: *And they talk about energy levels and having auras, and that could be hocus pocus but when I looked up in the stands, my Mom had glow around her, just so happy to be there and share in Atlanta, and I had my jogging partner and I said "look at my mom" and she's like "oh my God, I'm gonna cry, look at your mom". And so that was a big powerful feeling to have.*

Sharing of one's experiences can provide additional meaning and enjoyment.

RICHARD: *And when the recruiter came to my house, I wasn't just happy because here was this guy, talking to my family, wanting me to go to school because of what I had achieved in my sport. But my brother, at the time, was five years old. And he was so impressed with the recruiter and so happy for me, he said "I want a scholarship to your*

university too". When he was five years old! He went into my room and got my Team Canada bodysuit, put it on, and it was obviously too big for him, it was down to his ankles, and he was running back and forth in the backyard trying to show the guy that he could run too. And every time I think about that it makes me smile. And it's because of something that I did. I think that's the first time that he ever really showed any desire to achieve something. And he was five years old. So I mean, that made me pretty proud that I could be a part of that. I don't know, I'd say that would probably be my shining moment from sport, seeing my brother respond the way he did, as opposed to any personal accolade I've ever gotten or time I've ever run.

Not surprisingly, these athletes place their relationships in a position of central importance, ahead of their personal experiences in athletics.

SCOTT: *You know, I think relationships, first and foremost, take precedence in my life. Sports and work and all that stuff is secondary. My interaction with people is the most important thing in life.*

In summary, individuals are living authentically when they are able to present and see themselves for what they truly are, without distortion. Key individuals can give license to this authenticity through unconditional support and acceptance. The awareness and acceptance of emotions as indicators of what is most important to the individual is an important component of this authentic living. In addition, an attitude of humility can override the desire to live up to 'pedestal status' and keep individuals well-connected to the people around them.

Experiencing Fully

When individuals define themselves in enduring, complex ways, and live in a manner that keeps them connected to who they really are, they have the freedom to experience themselves, others, and their environments fully. The essence of this category is the ability to take in the full spectrum of one's experiences without preoccupation with outcomes and their implications. The four subcategories of experiencing fully are experiencing self through sport, connecting with others, immersion in the moment, and finding meaning and purpose.

Experiencing Self through Sport

The notion of 'sport as a vehicle for self-expression' resonates with the athletes in this study. The manner in which individuals experience their daily pursuits depends largely upon the focus that they take. While a whole later subcategory is devoted to the assignment of meaning, that theme is also evident here.

When the self is thought to have substance independent of one's activities, the focus can be on experience of the self rather than definition of it.

***MIKAELA:** Once I started kind of taking everything that I've learned and every thing that I do, and taking all the different parts of me and bringing that into what I do and who I am, it just became so much easier. It's just so easy now. Training is fun. You have to find a way as an athlete to bring yourself into your sport, and that's what makes you unique.*

The attributes by which one is defined can be experienced through sport.

***SCOTT:** Sport is like an extension of yourself, but it's not exactly who you are. It's a vehicle to experience the parts of me, like*

the competitiveness, the dedication, the discipline.

Significant value is attached to the 'process' of elite sport rather than outcomes. Athletes learned to focus on the daily experience of their pursuits.

***MIKAELA:** Regardless of what the end results are, I'm walking my path, I'm living my dream, I'm doing it. And I think that speaks volumes for itself.*

One athlete drew the conclusion that her happiness would have to precede her success, rather than resulting from it.

***RACHEL:** I think it was from that movie about the Jamaican bobsled team, with John Candy. He said something to the guys. They were getting ready for the big race, and getting all psyched up, and they wanted to win so badly, it's all they could think about. And he said "you know guys, regardless of what you do out there, it doesn't matter, the person that you are now, a gold medal isn't going to change that. If you're not happy with who you are and what you've done before you get it, it's not going to change that if you get that medal.*

This insight is tied directly to the appreciation of one's daily living, finding enjoyment in the process of training and competing.

***RACHEL:** And I think success and failure as well only magnify the true person you are. And that's definitely something that our sport psychologist took the time to talk specifically with me about is just being happy with, you know, what I was doing, my own routine, happy with where I was at, because I truly feel that way. Like, if you spend your whole life thinking that an Olympic medal is the only thing that matters, is the only achievement that means anything to you, if*

you get there and it doesn't happen, you could be a very grumpy, upset person, you know, especially if there's nothing else outside of that that's important or has great meaning to you.

Individuals recognized a breadth of experience that was made possible through their involvement in sport. For those willing to take them in, there is a wealth of experience that can enhance one's life.

CASSIE: *The travels, the people, the experiences, living abroad, just the knowledge I've gained for this field that I want to work in, and people skills, because in sport you learn so much about people, and interactions and emotions and all those kinds of things. And just being able to work with people in general. I like people. I realize that I'm so fortunate to have experienced all of these things.*

In summary, the freedom that individuals acquire through healthy self-definition and authentic living allow them to experience themselves through sport rather than being defined by it. In addition, seeking out the breadth of experience available through elite sport and focusing on the process of daily living and performing further enhance the quality of one's experiences.

Connecting with Others

In addition to experiencing the self through sport, individuals are afforded opportunities to connect closely with other people through their sports. One form of relationship that was considered to be extremely valuable was that with teammates. The highly emotional sport environment allows intense bonds to develop by virtue of the shared goals.

I: *What have you gotten out of sport? What is most rewarding about the experience?*

CASSIE: *I think, number one, like (name of teammate), she's my best friend and will be for the rest of my life. Like, we are so compatible. And her family is my family. So I think the level of relationship that you can get through these people is pretty amazing. Especially because you are all going for this one dream goal. And I think that kind of a thing, the support of helping each other through, so I know if something happens in my life, I know I can call any of those people and say "hey, this is what's going on". And I know that they will accept me unconditionally. And I think I can get that from a lot of people, but they just don't quite understand as much. So I think it's also ... this experience has been awesome, as I said, like, the process through it. But to be able to tell someone about it and for someone to really be able to understand it are two different things.*

The intensity of the environment and the powerful emotions it produces contribute to the formation of intense bonds that many find difficult to fully articulate.

JORDAN: *It's hard to articulate the bond, you'll know because you played a team sport, there is an incredible bond that guys get when they play together. And it's hard to explain it, it's just ... (significant other) and I will probably never have the same kind of bond, actually we will never have the same kind of bond that I had with this group of athletes. We haven't been to war together like the guys and I have been to war. And it's not to say that one relationship is better than the others.*

However, it is worth noting that perceiving oneself in a healthy manner may be necessary for the development of collegial versus adversarial relationships within sport.

CASSIE: *I don't think it's about driving and comparing to others. It's more to myself. And of course others are there to be compared to. And I hate that. I hate that kind of jealousy or the feeling that you have to prove yourself with the insecurity or whatever. And so I really try not to go there. But I think that relates back to how you feel about you. So you have to be secure with yourself before you can really connect with your teammates.*

Involvement in sport can provide opportunities to connect with others. The experience of others can be an enriching piece of an athlete's experience provided that one is open to these relationships. In addition, meaningful relationships with others can enhance one's ability to experience oneself and one's sport more fully.

Immersion in the Moment

Closely related to the experiential focus that was described in 'experiencing the self through sport' is the individual's ability to immerse oneself fully in the moment. This allows individuals to fully experience parts of themselves through their activities. Athletes described a state of living and performing that fully engages them. The experience itself takes a similar form for the athletes in this study.

CASSIE: *There's that undying energy that you have. You can just keep running and running and running. I call it a sense of calm. I'm totally activated, but I have this inner sense of calm. But it's a fine line because one thing can set me off. But then I scream or whatever and then can come back to it by refocusing. But there's this fine little line in between.*

This state is reinforcing in and of itself. It feels right.

COURTNEY: *(Commenting on why she continued to play despite major set-backs) It's because I love how I feel when I'm in the moment. And you can call it the zone or the adrenaline rush or whatever you want to call it, when it's just me and I'm in that state, I feel good. And that's what life's about to me is to be happy and feel good. So I decided to continue to play. So I thought "okay, a new perspective, I'm upbeat again". People could see it in my body language so it was great.*

Athletes experience a simultaneous peace and exhilaration, wherein peak performance can occur.

MIKAELA: *It's that quiet kind of exuberance, where everything seems to slow down. It's like everything's going inside of you, and it's racing, but when you're actually doing the activity in the moment, it's like you can see it and everything's in slow motion. And it's like all time just kind of like stands still or just slows down. And even though you're super-pumped up inside, everything just seems to go nice and slow. You can see every little bit of what happens. You know, it's not a blur. I find when I'm not in the moment, when everything else around me distracts me, then everything's a blur and everything's chaotic. But when you really seem to be enjoying it for the intrinsic factors, and you're just able to focus everything and bring it all in, it's like, you can be nervous, but it's that quiet ... it's that nervousness that gets you pumped up, but it just feels different, it feels special. You know that this isn't an everyday all the time kind of a moment. You know it's something different. And you just shoot for that little opening, that window of opportunity to see what can happen.*

Athletes become attuned to a feeling of performing, quite distinct from an outcome focus.

SCOTT: *You look to repeat those moments in sport because it's like you train forever to do it properly, and when you do it properly and you feel what it feels like to do it properly, it's like "woah", you know. Then it's all worth it. But you can get lost in that state. I can remember my best jumps very clearly.*

The primary challenge to this experience is the emphasis on outcomes and their importance. One can see the clear connection between focus on outcomes and the inability to immerse oneself fully in the moment.

COURTNEY: *Preoccupation with outcomes interferes with the full experience of the moment. And that's your ego.*

The fear of failure can have a powerful effect on one's mindset going into competition, taking the focus away from the opportunity to fully experience one's performance.

RICHARD: *We went to the World Junior Championships. This was the first time that I'd ever been to anything of that magnitude and to that level. And basically what happened is I got scared. I knew the competition was getting a little stiffer, and I didn't have the security of being back home and knowing I was the fastest guy anymore. I had a little bit of pain in my ankle, but it really wasn't anything. And basically what happened was I got scared and I started making excuses for myself before I even ran, you know "if I don't run well, it's probably because of my foot". And I made myself believe that it was that bad and in hindsight it wasn't that bad at all. And afterwards I felt so cheated, and not by anyone else but*

just myself, that I succumbed to the pressure and ... you know what, the only way you can succeed is if you don't care if you lose. I just felt so bad that I let myself ... that I did that to myself. And here was this awesome opportunity, the biggest opportunity of my life, to compete at the highest level for that age, and I just let it go. The way I was making excuses, I had beaten myself before I even ran the race. I mean, I was scared. And really who cares if you win or lose? There's all this pride and ego in sports and stuff but to me I honestly believe that if you don't put yourself out there in a vulnerable position, then you'll never really see how far you can go. You never really have tested yourself. And I mean that's the best tool you have to self-improvement and personal gain.

At such times, the individual needs to reconnect with their intrinsic enjoyment of the activity.

CHRIS: *When things get going almost too well, you kind of find yourself slipping over to where you're afraid to fail. Especially when it starts to go bad at the first part of it. You're very emotional. You suppress everything. You're moody when you get home and that whole thing. And you kind of go through that for a while and it kind of gets worse and worse and worse. And then all of a sudden, you just realize "what am I playing the game for? I'm playing it to have fun." And it's my livelihood, but you're not going to do any job that's not fun for very long. So you have to realize it.*

These athletes have been able to exercise control over this experience of immersion by focusing on the process of training and competing, the feeling of their sport, thereby letting go of the outcome focus and the expectations of others.

MIKAELA: *And when everything was about trying to please somebody else, or trying to please the masses, or you know, or trying to please coaches, or nay-sayers, people that tell you that you can't do it. When I took my focus away from that and said "I'm just gonna go out here and have fun, and see what I can do, and please myself" it took all the pressure away, it took all of the 'have-to's' away, and it became more of a wanting to.*

Experiencing one's sport 'internally', rather than relative to external considerations appears to positively influence the quality of experience.

MIKAELA: *There's a drive that I have to see what I can do. And it's not because if you throw a certain distance you get this money or you get this accolade or whatever. It's just that I look at what my body does when I'm training, and I know I can perform at that top level, and so my drive is just to see how far I can go. Whereas before it was kind of like, you know, trying to be that perfect athlete. And it's like now I don't have to prove anything. And when you stop trying to prove things to everybody else and just be, and just go out and do it and love doing it, it changes your whole energy, and it changes your whole reason for being out there, and then you get back to loving sport the same way you did, you know, when you were five years old and playing t-ball for the first time, you know, or you get in the pool for the first time and swimming, or all that stuff you did because it was fun. And you enjoyed going out because of the people that you'd see, and what you could do, and seeing if you could swim faster or throw farther or run faster or jump higher and all those things.*

This shift away from the external considerations also impacts one's focus and perform-

ance state, returning the athlete to the process of performing.

RACHEL: *And I think once I stopped worrying so much about what other people thought of me, and I didn't worry so much about how I had to place or who I was competing against, it just seemed like I relaxed a little bit and it was easier to focus. The way I focus is I just set new goals and I really specifically try to focus on that goal and how I went about achieving it, which is through the training, the everyday ups and downs ... the process really.*

Connecting with the self involves seeing one's pursuits not as a source of self-definition, but rather as a vehicle for experiencing one's personal qualities and a breadth of experiences made possible through those pursuits. Full immersion in one's activities is enhanced when preoccupation with outcomes is overcome and one focuses on the feeling and the process of performing.

Positive growth in the categories and sub-categories described to this point appears to facilitate one's full experience of sport. This process of unburdened immersion in one's activities has important implications for the athlete. Without being consumed with pressure, one can relax and perform. There seems to be a general calming effect and a clarity that athletes experience when they are not preoccupied with outcomes, they see themselves in healthy terms, and they're focused on the process of performing.

The participants had some important insights about the role of perspective in their performances. Among these is the realization that one is engaged in one's passion.

I: So you're on the court and you realize that there are more important things to you

than volleyball. How does that affect the way you play?

COURTNEY: *It'll actually have that calming effect come over me because I am still doing something that I enjoy and I have passion for. It's been such a big part of my life. So that's okay for that to pop in for a second. In fact, with (my sport) we do that a lot. Sometimes we just look out and look where we are, you know, it's pretty fabulous. Does that take away from our game? No.*

In addition, sharing the experience with others can further enhance one's affective state.

I: *Now that you're at this point in your life, when you go to compete, are you a better competitor?*

SCOTT: *Ultimately I think it would be more beneficial to competition, because then the reasons why I compete wouldn't be for the money or the fame or the fortune or whatever. It's not for those reasons, it's because I enjoy competing and it's something I'm good at and I want to bring out the best in myself. And if I do it really well, not only am I happy, but I know that it makes other people happy too.*

Even at times of extreme pressure, athletes can let go of the pressure in favour of focusing on the feeling of the sport, thus freeing oneself to perform optimally.

SCOTT: *I've seen both, where you really want to make a team badly and the only thing that counts is that you make the team and you don't exactly get your best performance because you're worried about each round. And that preoccupies you. "Only five more jumps. Oh, only four more jumps." Or whatever. But when you're there and you're just enjoying it, and even though there may be something on the line,*

you get joy from what you're doing. And there's pleasure there, not because you're doing your best. I find that usually at those times when you don't have pressure that you've put on yourself, and you just enjoy your performance, I think those are the times that you actually do your best. And those are the times, you know, it's almost like a circle, where you do your best when there's no pressure and there's no pressure when you do your best.

The discussion took a different focus with another athlete, broadening the term 'performance', then making a distinction between the short and long term.

I: *People are going to ask me whether the athletes who gain perspective perform better than others.*

MEAGHAN: *Well, I think you have to say what is performing better. Does that mean that they win everything, or does that mean that ... obviously only one person can be number one in the world, does that mean that the ones with the right perspective are number one in the world? Or does that mean that those athletes perform better meaning that if they're fifth, or if they're third, or if they're first, they're still okay with that. What are they going to ask?*

I: *They're probably going to ask, bottom line, you take two people with equal ability, give one of them this type of perspective, and the other this kind of 'skating is your life', which one will skate faster?*

MEAGHAN: *If you're talking in one year, I don't know. It could be either one. But if you're talking over a few years, I think it's the one with the right perspective because having the wrong perspective, obviously you're looking at winning. If you're looking at winning, then you have a fear of losing. If*

you have a fear of losing, you're going to be looking at all the other people who are trying to catch you, and all you're going to be thinking about is winning, winning, winning. If you do win one year, you're gonna go "okay, what now?" You know? Yeah, you can keep at it but I think that catches up to a person. Where, I mean I see it in all sports, and I see it in myself, as long as you have a healthy perspective and a healthy life outside of sport, that's going to continue because you're going to keep the drive, you're going to keep positive. People are going to want to be around you. And so, I think ultimately, over a few years, it's the athlete with the right perspective that's gonna perform best, but I guess for me performance isn't always being number one in the world. Performance is on and off the ice.

The process of immersing one fully in the moment appears to be enhanced by the perspective process described to this point, and this immersion allows the athlete to let go of an outcome focus, enjoy the feeling of the performance and, in turn (ironically) perform optimally.

Finding Meaning & Purpose

A crucial part of experiencing fully involves the meaning and purpose that individuals ascribe to the events and experiences in their lives. The same experiences can be given completely different meanings by two different people. The way the participants perceive themselves and connect to themselves and others can be seen in the meanings they attach to experiences. There is a sense of order and purpose in virtually every event.

An important part of this pattern is the purpose with which these athletes engage in their sports. Perhaps most importantly, they are willing to ask themselves whether their sport still holds passion and fulfillment, willing to face the implications of either

response. It seems that, in order to maintain passion for one's sport, one must be willing to leave it when it loses its magic or another focus holds more.

COURTNEY: *Generally speaking, I'd say I'm one that copes well, but this past year has been a trying time for me. I don't know if I've coped very well, but I know that I'm still doing what I'm doing and I'm still involved in my sport, so I know that I've had to re-evaluate and gain my perspective back on what's important to me and why I'm still playing and finding the passion again.*

This requires the courage to face when one is ready for transition out of sport, into new priorities. 'Listening to one's heart', looking honestly at where one's passion lies, can provide both purpose in one's sport and a natural indicator of timing for transition.

MEAGHAN: *I think the best word in there is 'passion' because that's what drives people in anything. In relationships, and sport, and work, as soon as you don't have that, then I don't think people should be doing what they're doing. You know, sometimes I think it can be blocked, and you have to rekindle it, even in sport, but once it's gone ... you know, I think that's what drives people. And I think as long as you see that that's what drives you, that that's your motivation then that's a good thing. If you lose that passion, then it's not a bad thing, it's just time to move on to something else. And I think it can sometimes even be there, but you can move on. I don't think that's a bad thing, because the passion can be channeled elsewhere. I mean, probably when I retire, the passion will still be there, but the passion for other things might be stronger.*

Individuals are able to separate the hassles of their environment from their love of the sport.

CHRIS: *But it is tough to go on the road and leave my family at home. The thing I guess you think about is, for our game, come summertime, however long or short it is, they've got me pretty much exclusively. Other than a couple hours in the morning when I work out, I'm at home. So we kind of tailor our lives around that. In the summertime, I'm all theirs. Whatever they want to do, I have to be around and be willing, especially with my son. In the wintertime, it's tough, but I guess it's what you get paid for. Because the game ... people ask me to come out and play shinny with them at night, and for sure I'm gonna go out and do it because you love the game and you like playing it so much that it isn't a job. I guess the job comes in when you have to get up early in the morning and take that 3-hour flight and get in and practice. Those are the hard things.*

Essentially, the first and most important question is answered based on how the activity makes the person feel. Returning to the feeling one wishes to create can generate energy and optimism about the future.

RILEY: *And it took me pretty much until the start of June (after a challenging set of obstacles in the prior season) to really want to start training and want to start getting back in the game. And things just sort of went over; I realized it was just another set-back and there are many players like myself who have been in this situation before. So then I just sort of started to remember some of the enjoyable times in university hockey and the world junior championships, and even in pro, some of the success I had, and remembering the feeling I had in pro where I finally felt that "hey, I belong at this level,*

and these players are great players but I can play with them". And I think that motivation came back to me, and as I started to train again, I sort of got the motivation "well hey, I have another organization to prove to here. It's a new start".

As other pursuits and foci start to take on greater importance a natural transition can be made out of sport, where new passions emerge and demand attention. The closing days of one's career can take on additional sentiment at this time.

SCOTT: *I keep seeing that there are some lectures and talks at the sport centre on athletes retiring, and how to reintegrate yourself into society and stuff like that. I think that's wild. I think if an athlete has that balance and that perspective in life, a complete life, not just athletics, they wouldn't have to be reintegrated back into society. They'd already be part of it. There are too many athletes, it seems like, that have a problem retiring, like it's a bad thing to retire, it's a bad thing to leave the sport. I'm looking forward to it. People hear me talk and they say "man, you're talking too much like you're done already". And I'm like "no, I'm just looking forward to it". I'm anticipating that part of my life because there are other things I want to get on and do. So I'm excited about going on and doing these other things. I'm not forgetting what's going on right now. I'm enjoying what I'm doing right now, and I'm working hard to make this my best year possibly, but I see other things that are after that. So it's tough for me to understand that. I think if I had continued doing sport the way I was doing sport before, and I hadn't gotten suspended, and hadn't had the life-changing things, yeah, I could see that being a problem, because my identity was athletics. You know, that's where I got my identity from.*

Ultimately, transition out of sport and into other pursuits can be faced reflectively and positively.

SCOTT: *It's really cool, now that my career is winding down. This will probably be my last year. If I get carded, I might stick around for the money (laughs), because they owe me a couple of years I think. (laughs) I'm looking forward to this year. Like, I'm training really hard and everything's focused and going, but I'm looking forward to the end of it also. You know, and I'm content with that. Like I'm ready to. There are other things I'd like to start doing in life that I have put on hold because of athletics. I find myself reflecting and looking back on all the years that I've been in track and field, and some of the good things, some of the bad things, and when I'm training I'm remembering some things over the years that we did, and I find myself smiling and just enjoying it. And remembering that there have been more positive things than bad things, and just looking forward to finishing off the year and finishing off the season, and then calling it good. And not being angry or bitter or leaving the sport and saying "what if this and what if that?" or having to tell tall tales about my accomplishments in track. And I see people that say "oh, didn't he go to so and so Olympics and do really well?" or "actually, I don't think he ever made a team or anything like that", and they go back and they have these big stories, and it's bad because they still don't understand what life is really all about.*

Ultimately, the athletes seem to view sport as an opportunity for fulfillment, a source of experiencing fully. When that opportunity expires, other sources are considered.

One of the most striking patterns found in this group of athletes involves their appraisals of adversity. Lessons, growth, and some

purpose are sought and attached to whatever challenges that these individuals face. While some draw on religious faith, all seem to identify a sense of order and meaning in adversity.

COURTNEY: *I mean, every ... I guess you could call them negative points or obstacles that I think I've had my fair share lately, and I know that I'm a stronger person for those things. And it's not always fun to go through shitty things like that, but for sure they ... and everyone tells me they make me stronger (laughs). But I do believe that and that's why, when something's dealt my way, I just find a way. And whether that's inner strength because I had to draw on those past experiences, "it's just another thing, I can do it", you know, those are the things that go through my head. But certainly they've made me stronger, even though, when you're in the middle of them, you feel weak, like you can't go on.*

These individuals expressed a faith in an order of things (some of them religious), wherein things happen for a reason, and all experiences have some functional purpose.

MEAGHAN: *But also, I mean, again I come back to faith because being a Christian athlete, that's the biggest thing. And my husband grew up in a Christian home and I didn't, and so you really start to question why things happen to you. And I think that's the path it put me on, the "why would this happen to me", and you don't say that God let's things happen to you, but you know, maybe ... I think for everything that happens, there's a reason. And good things come from it. And, you know, good things came of it. And ultimately I wished it had never happened, but I think ultimately I'm a better person because that happened.*

Among the benefits of adversity is a re-ordering of lost priorities, and the ultimate assurance that one can get through hard times.

MEAGHAN: *And that's where I really started soul-searching (after major disappointment), and I think if I had been in a position where I had won a medal, I almost get scared of what I would have become, what kind of athlete I would have become, because I had this idea that you were more important if you had a medal.*

JORDAN: *There's all kinds of adversity that you run into along the way. Things that get you down and then you have to reset your course and refocus on the things that you want to be or were and you'll put a little less weight into getting all hyped up over a big win or whatever the case may be.*

One athlete's 'rock bottom' experience had a profound influence on his philosophy of life, reconnecting him with the things of primary importance in his life.

SCOTT: *It was like a wake-up call. It's like you go through something devastating or something really hard, and it just sort of brings you back, it settles you and brings you back to a focus.*

The competitiveness of one athlete was apparent in his view of adversity as yet another opportunity to test oneself.

RICHARD: *It's when you fall into the little valleys or injury or, you know, something else in your life that takes away or kind of hinders your progress, that's when the true testament occurs and you have to ... it's kind of like a reality check, a gut check, and you look inside and see if you have what it takes to get over whatever hurdles are put in your way.*

Adversity was also put into 'perspective' in relation to a broader context.

MIKAELA: *Just because you never go to an Olympics or win a medal, doesn't mean you haven't accomplished anything. You look at all the days of training and everything that you've done, I mean, that's accomplishment. And you compare that to someone with quadriplegia or a spinal injury. They'd kill to be able to get up and go for a run or go for a walk. It helps to put it in perspective. Every day you're out there doing something that somebody else wishes that they could do.*

Shared experiences, even the painful ones are ultimately seen as valuable, and can be taken as part of a package of meaningful experiences that come with involvement in elite sport.

JORDAN: *At the end of the day, it's just a game. It certainly didn't finish the way we had wanted to. I wanted to finish in Sydney. But the journey, from the mountain retreat through the Pan-Am Games, through the Olympic quals, the tour of Australia, you know, it's the journey that I'll remember. And standing on the podium in (major games). I mean, if you rest it all on the Olympic qual then yeah, the whole two years was a tragic waste of time. But I would have never met our sport psych, I met my girlfriend at a tournament, and the same with all these people I wouldn't have met and have had the pleasure of meeting, and it's all part of that journey, meeting those people.*

In short, these individuals find meaning and purpose in virtually everything that happens to them. While they may struggle with events at the time, there is faith that the lesson of value in each experience will be re-

vealed in time. In addition, events and experiences are considered in relation to a broader picture; things are placed in ‘perspective’. The meanings that are ascribed to different experiences seem to reinforce the philosophy by which these individuals try to live, especially as they pertain to the definition of the self, authentic living, and the full experience of the self and others.

Summary of Model

The process seems to be about the willingness to *see the self for what it really is*, in all its complexity, the good and bad, and the weak and strong. Simultaneously, individuals must be willing to *see value* in the traits that they have, the process of their lives, and their experiences in and of themselves. Individuals are then in a position to *experience the self for all that it can be*, and to *present themselves authentically*, that is, for what they truly are. This includes taking ownership of their *emotions*, accepting them, and using them to stay in touch with the things that are of greatest value to them.

Relationships play a large role in completing a fulfilling lifestyle. For this reason, engaging in the commitment and risk-taking required to establish open, authentic relationships further enhances the experiences and growth of each individual. In particular, close intimate relationships provide a feeling of being understood and accepted, and afford individuals both sanctuary and strength. Adopting and maintaining a sense of belonging, closeness, and community involves an openness to sharing one’s experiences with others and sharing in the experiences of others. It also requires humility when successful, and dignity in failure, that lessens the tendency to push away from people at those times.

Through the *acceptance and experience of the self and others* comes a strength to face

whatever events occur in one’s life, and a courage to let this objective guide and direct the manner in which one lives and responds. In other words, individuals are then able to find meaning and purpose in virtually every experience, good and bad, and to use those experiences to continually reconnect with themselves and others.

Two Conceptual Trains on the Same Track

Orlick (1998) advocated the maintenance of a sense of balance and perspective in sport and life. His definition of balance, distinct from balance in a time management sense, clearly shares common ground with the perspective model: Finding beauty passion, and meaning in the different loves of your life, and living those loves – everyday. Balance is respecting your needs for achievement and relaxation, work and play, giving and receiving, intimacy and personal space (p.xiii).

Amirault and Orlick’s (1998) exploration of the term balance in the lives of elite athletes revealed that athletes refuted the notion that different aspects of one’s life could be “balanced” with equal amounts of time. Athletes respected the enormous amount of one’s time that is required to excel in sport. Temporal balance was not seen as a viable option.

Careful consideration of Amirault and Orlick’s (1998) study leads us to believe that we were investigating the same basic phenomenon. An athlete in their study spoke of an “inner harmony” meaning “listening to yourself, not everyone else and focusing on one thing at a time” (p.38). Certain common elements are evident. Making a conscious decision to have balance is similar to the importance of awareness of the perspective process. Enjoying what you’re doing mirrors the passion and purpose that the per-

spective participants sought in their sports. Being in the moment (balance) matches the idea of immersion on the moment (perspective). Having a support network (balance) mirrors the emphasis that the perspective athletes placed on intimacy, support, and shared experience.

However, we feel that the perspective model provides an elaboration of fundamental importance. Perspective speaks to the manner in which one views the self and the role that this plays in the ability to live authentically and experience fully. This mode of seeing the self is perhaps best expressed through a metaphor. Van Deurzen (1998) described the self as a vessel (container). We fill the vessel with contents such as roles, activities, and relationships. But while these ‘contents’ appear to give the vessel substance, they are unstable, and so when we lose a part of these contents, we feel empty and hollow. But van Deurzen argues that we have not lost the essence of the self. The container itself, with its dimensions and properties defines the self.

Likewise, when we recognize the qualities that we have that cut across any role, activity, or relationship, we are no longer bound

by the nature of our contents. Instead, we are able to experience ourselves *through the contents*, rather than being defined by them. This thought process may have been best illustrated by the lack of apprehension that the participants had about the prospects of transition.

Perspective involves making peace with the authentic self, then setting out to experience it fully through one’s activities and key relationships. The role of humility in staying connected to others is an additional contribution of the model, as is the central importance of authenticity, and emotional awareness/expression. We feel that the process of meaning-making is also clearer through this perspective study, in its consideration of responses to adversity.

We believe that the core questions remain constant; how can people live authentically with themselves and others in order to experience life fully, purposefully, and passionately? What are the barriers to these connections? How can we reconnect to these things of most profound importance? The future of this inquiry is daunting, but it is well worth our while.

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