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## **Cartwheels on Ice: A Phenomenological Exploration of Children's Enjoyment in Competitive Figure Skating**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses a phenomenological study of children's experience of enjoyment in figure skating. The study's objective was to explore and understand the lived experience of eight athletes aged 8 – 10 years. To achieve this objective, six female and two male athletes from three different ice skating clubs in the southeastern United States participated in a taped unstructured phenomenological interview. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and inductively analyzed, utilizing the hermeneutic circle (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). The global themes that emerged from the data suggest that the young athletes ultimately enjoyed their time in figure skating when they were doing something for the *First Time*, *Getting Better*, *Being Creative*, *Experiencing the Body*, and being around *Other People*.

### **Introduction**

Previous research has shown that children's key motive for participation in youth sports programs is to have fun (Chalip, Csikszentmihalyi, Kleiber, & Larson, 1984; Ewing, Seefeldt, & Brown, 1996; Kleiber, 1981; Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 1987; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985a; Wankel & Sefton, 1989; Weiss, 1995). Though there is no consensus on the conceptual definition of enjoyment among researchers<sup>1</sup>, the word "fun" seems to be children's primary signifier to indicate any positive experience in the context of sport and exercise. According to developmental psychologist Susan Harter (1981), positive constructive experiences are extremely important for young children's psychosocial growth because their achievement motivation is mediated by

affective states such as feelings of competence, self-worth, and enjoyment. Hence, knowing what makes youth sport participation enjoyable can help coaches, sport psychology professionals, and parents become more effective in planning and structuring sports programs, improving the overall quality of children's experiences in sports setting.

Early studies examining enjoyment in youth sports were characterized by attempts to develop an appropriate instrument for measuring the important contributing factors. Wankel and Kreisel (1985a), for example, developed a ten-item paired comparison inventory that included several sources of enjoyment based on achievement motivation theory. They then surveyed a sample of adolescent male baseball, soccer, and hockey players, who were asked to rank the sources of enjoyment for their particular sport. The researchers found that intrinsic factors consisting of "excitement of the game," "personal accomplishments," "improving skills," and "doing skills" were the highest ranked sources of enjoyment. Ranked next in importance were social factors, such as "being on the team" and "being with friends." Extrinsic factors consisting of "winning," "getting rewards," and "pleasing others" were ranked the lowest.

In a further attempt to define the construct of sport enjoyment and develop items to predict enjoyment in sporting activities, Scanlan and her colleagues conducted a series of research studies that resulted in identifying additional sources of enjoyment in youth sports (c.f., Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, & Simons, 1993). For example, Scanlan and Lewthwaite found that male wrestlers aged 9 to 14 years, who experienced relatively greater enjoyment from their sport participation, perceived (a) greater parental and coach satisfaction with their performance, (b) less negative maternal interactions, and (c) more positive adult sport involvement. In a subsequent study, Scanlan et al. found that 47% of the variance in sport enjoyment for female and male athletes, aged 10 to 19 years, was significantly predicted by a composite of the following factors: Positive Team Interactions and Support, Positive Coach Support and Satisfaction with Players' Seasonal Performance, and Effort and Mastery.

Thus previous research suggests that achievement-related indices, especially those that are internally regulated such as perceived effort and skill mastery, play a salient role in the young athletes' experiences of enjoyment. It is also proposed that social factors such as making friends and positive team interactions are associated with youth sport enjoyment. In addition, although the existing literature generally supports the idea that youth participation in sports can be enjoyable even if it is not prompted by intrinsic factors (e.g., winning and pleasing significant others), extrinsic factors were not found to be substantial predictors of children's enjoyment in sports.

The results of undertaken quantitative studies have revealed several possible sources of enjoyment in youth sports; nevertheless, the employed methodology has, for the most part, restricted athletes' responses to a number of predefined parameters. In some studies, the age range was quite large and likely incorporated several developmental stages. There also appears to be a prevalence of male athletes and/or team athletes used as participants in the existing motivation research. Further, and to the best of the author's knowledge, there is a lack of study into the experience of enjoyment of children in youth sports programs from the perspective of the child. Hence exploring qualitative methodologies that would provide us with insights into how young athletes make sense of the sporting aspect of their lives might be especially beneficial

since, as Piaget observed, children differ from adults not only quantitatively, in terms of the *amount* of knowledge in their possession, but also qualitatively through the way they *organize* knowledge (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

The purpose of my study was to provide a space for young athletes to describe in their own words the experiences in figure skating that they found particularly enjoyable. Throughout the study, I wanted to step into the young skaters' "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1962) to capture the richness and diversity of their lived experience and to gain greater insight into the interpretation and meaning of enjoyment from the perspective of the child. To achieve this purpose, an existential phenomenological approach emphasizing the unique perspective of each participant was utilized (Valle & Halling, 1989).

## Method

### *Participants*

In phenomenological studies, participants are viewed as the experts of the phenomenon of interest. According to Polkinghorne (1989), the two essential criteria for selecting participants for a phenomenological research project are that the individuals have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and they are able and willing to describe their experiences during the interview process. My research participants were selected because they had had competitive experience in figure skating, had been actively engaged in skating activities, and were willing to participate in an in-depth interview to discuss their experience of sport enjoyment.

Eight Caucasian (six female and two male) competitive figure skaters from three different ice skating clubs in the southeastern United States were interviewed for this project. The participants ranged in age from 8 to 10 years. On average, their skating experience was five years and ranged from two to six years. All of the athletes were singles skaters. Some were also involved in paired events (one was a female pairs skater and another one was a female ice dancer). The participants' skill level varied from the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA) free skating pre-preliminary (i.e., lowest USFSA level) to intermediate (i.e., highest USFSA level for this sample).

### *The Phenomenological Interview*

The primary goal of phenomenology is to derive the essence, structure, or form of human experience through the use of descriptive techniques such as reflection, interviews, and the analysis of written statements (Kvale, 1983). The phenomenological interview is perhaps the most powerful technique for attaining a rigorous and *thick* description of another person's being-in-the-world and is often viewed as the form of a dialogue. The dialogue presupposes an unforced flow of questions that arise from the inter-subjective space of the two people's conversation and in this sense radically differs from the course of a traditional interview, which is structured to obtain answers on the questions that have been determined in advance (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

Furthermore, the phenomenological interview is a *collaborative* process of evoking colorful

descriptions of the phenomenon and empathetic understanding of the multiple ways in which the child makes sense of the lived experience. Contrary to the objectivists' attempts to de-contextualize human existence in an effort to capture its "true" essence, existential phenomenologists believe that both experience and making sense of the experience occur in and are mediated by social discourse. To extract the phenomenon from its context is to fail to account for the articulated totality of the life-world of the individual. As Pollio and colleagues (1997) rightly pointed out, "the description of an experience as it emerges in a particular context is the experience" (p. 31; italics in original) and the primary focus of the existential phenomenological tradition.

### *Procedure*

I personally contacted the eight figure skaters who met the selection criteria for this study along with their parents to determine their interest in being interviewed. At that time, I informed them of the objectives of the study, told the athletes that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they were free to stop the interview at any time without penalty or prejudice. All of the skaters I recruited agreed to take part in the study. I then scheduled a convenient time with them to conduct the interviews.

Before each interview, a parental consent was obtained first. Then, the participants read and completed an assent form. I made every effort to ensure that the young skaters had a full understanding of the procedure. To protect their identities, I asked these athletes to choose a pseudonym to use as an identifier throughout the study (i.e., on the transcribed interviews and/or any written manuscripts). Once the participants understood the entire process, they signed the assent form, and the phenomenological interview was conducted.

All interviews took place in a private room located at the skating rink. Each interview was audiotaped and lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. The interview protocol consisted of one open-ended question, "Tell me about a time in figure skating that you really enjoyed," which is a common interview protocol in an existential phenomenological study (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). All other questions emerged from the context of the dialogue and were aimed at achieving clarification or elaboration of the participant's experience. I used these unstructured probes only to explore further areas mentioned by the child (e.g., Can you tell me more about this? What was it like? Can you describe how it made you feel?).

### *Data Analysis*

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the audiotapes verbatim. One interview was discarded due to the poor quality of the tape. I then used an interpretive research group to assist me in thematizing the transcripts. The interpretive group consisted of interdisciplinary scholars familiar with phenomenological methodology. The primary function of the group was to provide critical rather than consensual assessment of the text. Since the interpretive research group offered a broader perspective on the text, helping to reveal contextual patterns that might not be noticed by the individual researcher, it can be viewed as a form of "investigator triangulation" (Denzin, 1978).

Prior to engaging in the thematization process, all members of the research group signed a confidentiality statement. During the thematization process, we utilized the hermeneutic circle to analyze the interview data (Pollio, et al., 1997; Thompson, et al., 1989). The purpose of the hermeneutical interpretation of the transcribed interview is to achieve an empathetic understanding, or *Verstehen*, of the lived experience from the participant's perspective.

The notion of the hermeneutic circle is central to the interpretive understanding of the text. The hermeneutic circle is a methodological procedure of qualitative analysis in which there is a constant movement between parts and whole of the text with no definite beginning and ending points (Palmer, 1969). Similarly to the existential phenomenological perspective of the insoluble unity between embodied experience and its context, the hermeneutical interpretation assumes that "any given passage of the text is always understood in terms of its relation to the whole, both preceding and following, rather than as a decontextualized thing-in-itself" (Pollio, et al., 1997, p. 50).

It is almost impossible to present a set of specific rules guiding the hermeneutical interpretation of the interview transcript because "the process is more a matter of tacit knowledge than explicit application" (Pollio, et al., 1997, p. 50). The logic of a circular hermeneutic movement between parts and whole of the text is reflected in seeking an idiographic understanding of each interview and the nomothetic understanding of the whole of the experience as it emerges across all interviews on the same topic.

In the context of my study, the first step was to read each transcript separately to get a sense of the whole of interview. Then members of my interpretive group read the transcripts aloud line by line to get a sense for the meaning units within the transcript. The reading was interspersed with frequent pauses to discuss the nature of the data and understand interrelatedness of the meaning units within the content of the text. Any description of a component of the lived experience can only be understood in the context of the whole of the experience and that sometimes the "authentic" meaning of the text can be the opposite of its literal meaning (Moran, 2000).

As an example, my participants' awareness of their bodies was a focal component of their skating experience. The most prominent aspect of this theme was seen in the young athletes' attempts to make sense of how their body felt at the time of a jump. Bud was very excited when talking about jumping: "You go up in the air! You've got this weightless feeling...neat one...weightless...you're just in the air falling." However, Bud also described feeling pain in his leg when landing a jump. The literal reading of the "body in pain" passage does not provide support for the corporeal experience as being enjoyable. When the passage was related to other means of living the body, such as feeling "weightless," "stretched," and/or "right," Bud's experience of pain had emerged as an intricate component of the fundamental experience of the body in motion—the very core of his athletic existence.

The next level of relating a part to the whole was achieved in the process of immersing and interpreting each interview in the context of all other interviews. During the group interpretation, we identified commonalities among the experiences of enjoyment described in the transcripts. These common patterns that emerge across interviews are often referred to as global themes

(Kvale, 1983). At the stage of identifying global themes, it is important that the researcher periodically refers back to the individual transcripts to gather support for each theme (Thompson, et al., 1989).

The final product of a hermeneutical interpretation of data is usually presented as a perceptual thematic structure that elucidates interrelationships among themes, describing the experiential pattern of the investigated phenomenon. In addition, the researcher writes a thick description of the nomothetic thematic structure of the lived experience and takes the description back to the participants to ensure that it has captured the phenomenon as lived by each participant. According to Patton (1990), the checking of findings against participants' perspectives is one of the approaches to establishing descriptive and interpretive validity. Lather (1991) has further argued that the act of "giving back" the findings to participants acknowledges the reciprocity of qualitative fieldwork.

My struggle at this final stage was to produce a nomothetic thematic description that would make sense to the children between 8 and 10 years of age. As a result, I constructed a representative bricolage named Sasha. Sasha represented a composite of all the participants whose gender, as the name suggested, could be either male or female. Sasha's story was written in the rich mixture of young athletes' words (taken verbatim from their interview transcripts) and expressed the different voices and meanings associated with each child's experience. Instead of distilling individual themes and separately defining them, the bricolage as "a pieced-together set of representations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4) described how the components of enjoyment that had emerged from the interviews were interconnected and related to one another within the context of figure skating.

### *Validation*

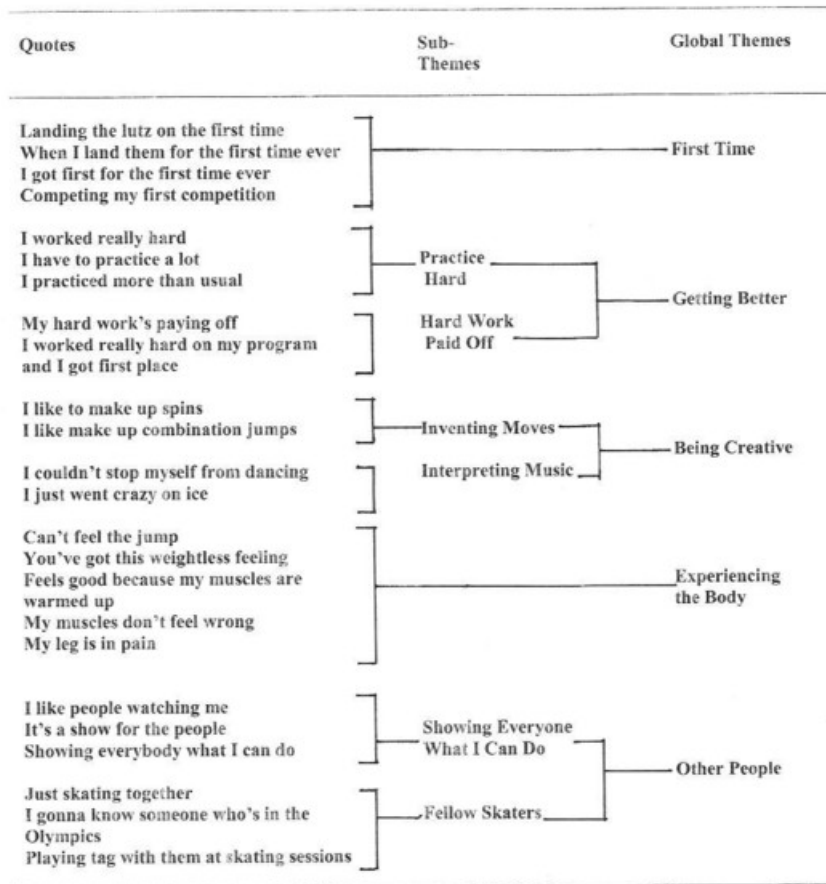
In interpretive qualitative research, it is impossible to separate the researcher from the study. Personal values and beliefs are integral parts of the research process from the moment of identifying the topic of interest to that of selecting an appropriate epistemological framework, to the highlighting of the meaning of the phenomena encountered in the investigation (Smith, 1983). Thus every stage of qualitative inquiry depends on the skills, training, insights, and interpretive lens of the researcher.

The two primary procedures used in this study to control my theoretical and experiential preconceptions of the phenomenon of enjoyment were bracketing and the equivalent of member checking. Bracketing, as defined by Pollio et al. (1997), is a process of identifying and sensitizing the researcher's presuppositions and conceptual biases that may distort the researcher's view. It was an ongoing process and consisted of a bracketing interview, during which I was interviewed about the topic of my investigation, and use of a research group in the interpretation of the interviews. The equivalent of member checking involved returning to participants and asking them whether Sasha's story captured their lived experience of enjoyment in figure skating (Dale, 1996; Patton, 1990).

## Results

The phenomenon of skating enjoyment for my participants was experienced in doing something for the *First Time*, *Getting Better*, *Being Creative*, *Experiencing the Body*, and in the context of *Other People*. The hierarchical thematic representation of the phenomenon of skating enjoyment is depicted in Figure 1. It is important to note that although several global themes usually emerge from the data, these themes are not alien to each other but create a contextual pattern, in which different particulars of the lived phenomenon became prominent at different moments of time. In this section, these themes along with representative supporting quotes are presented.

Figure 1. Thematic representation of the phenomenon of skating enjoyment



### *Theme One: Doing Something for the First Time*

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was the young figure skaters' experience of doing something "for the first time." The most frequently mentioned component was landing a jump or jumps "for the first time ever." The highlight of Katie's experience of enjoyment, for example, was a time when she "landed a double flip." Similarly, Michelle stated, "[when] I do it for the first time, I get really excited and happy." All participants described the excitement of the

*First Time* as both “surprising” and “enjoyable.”

It is important to point out that young athletes expressed amazing awareness of their work-in-progress on a larger scale of improvement. They recognized and enjoyed the accomplishment of the sequential tasks. The following quote supports this point:

I got really close today. It made me really happy because I have been working on it [the axel] for so long, and sometimes my tries are good and sometimes they are bad...but I got my foot crossed for the first time today (Michelle).

### *Theme Two: Getting Better*

This theme describes “a really, really powerful feeling” of getting better in competitive figure skating. The theme *Getting Better* can only be understood as an emotional gestalt produced by two inextricably intertwined but textually exclusive sub-themes, (1) Practice Hard and (2) Hard Work Pays Off.

*Practice hard.* The focus of Practice Hard sub-theme is on the challenging process of learning new skills and working towards the achievement of mastery goals. The young athletes expressed great determination for acquiring new skills and they perceived their intense effort to succeed to be enjoyable. Many participants preferred to talk about a time when they “practice a lot” and/or “work hard” as the most enjoyable aspect of skating. “I like learning new things,” asserted Kayla, “especially things I see older kids doing.” Likewise Jonathan wanted to “know a lot of new jumps and choreography.” Cassy showed similar determination, “If I mess up on something, I’ll get up, try it again, and I’ll get it.” Izzy’s quote perhaps sums it up best, “There can be days when things are just not working and that frustrates me when that happens. But I’m told...and I believe that I just gotta pick it up, keep moving, and not let it be so ‘blah.’”

*Hard work pays off.* The sub-theme Hard Work Pays Off captures the participants’ experience of seeing the outcomes of their hard work. Young athletes described that experience in terms of mastery outcomes and competitive outcomes. Kayla recounted how she especially enjoyed one day when she landed all her jumps. In a similar vein, Bud explained that his feeling of being “very, very, very happy” stemmed from the fact that he did “21 rotations on the sit spin” and “got to ten revolutions” on the camel spin. It took him about six months of practice to master these challenging skills.

Some skaters also liked to receive public recognition of their hard work. As Michelle described:

I worked really hard on my program for that [competition] and I wanted to get first place with it...and I got first place. I was really happy because I knew my work had paid off, and I actually did it.

In summary, the following quote epitomizes the process and associated meaning of *Getting Better* as it emerged for the young skaters:



...I do all the sheets that I have to do for all my jumps...I have to do five of each double and see how many I land out of five...and when I'm finished with my sheet, I can see how I'm getting better at it...It feels really good...like I'm getting higher and moving on all the way up...to the top...And the top is a gold medal at the Olympics (Kayla).

### *Theme Three: Being Creative*

*Being Creative* emerged as an essential theme of the phenomenon of skating enjoyment and included two sub-themes: (1) Inventing Moves and (2) Interpreting Music.

*Inventing moves.* This sub-theme illustrates how acquiring skating experience and attaining mastery enabled young athletes to utilize their creative potential.

I like to make up spins...one spin I did was sort of like a camel except you're not spinning on that stiff leg like when you do a camel...and you do just a one foot spin and then you go higher than a camel, bend your knee, and grab it. I can only do about three rotations but I'm working on it (Michelle).

Michelle explained that practicing her "own spins" was "not really that hard either because [she had] made them up." She further revealed, "Some spins that I make up I can't even do them! But I'm working on them too." It appeared that "making up stuff" as a creative form of self-expression was meaningful in and of itself. These moves were made up and practiced "just for fun," and then could be added to a program "if [they] fit in the music."

Another figural aspect of the participants' kinesthetic creativity was their pursuit of technical proficiency. Katie's description of her practice of the under-rotated double salchow exemplifies this idea:

On a double salchow I just thought of something...it's like...when you do a three turn into it, I could turn all the way forward and then jump...and that's how I do it. But you have to start backwards so I'm only doing one and a half...but I'm just practicing it like that...so later on I can do it from backwards to backwards.

*Interpreting music.* As in other expressive art forms, the young figure skaters experienced a sensory connection to both their inner selves and to the audience. They took pleasure in the free play of movements that accompanied their interpretation of music. The following quote exemplifies joy derived from such improvisation:

One time I was having a lesson...and it was that music playing and I couldn't stop myself from dancing to it. So I got a beautiful dance to it. It was like the spark that kept me going. So I had to do a program to it. That was a lot of fun (Izzy).

### *Theme Four: Experiencing the Body*

The young figure skaters' awareness of their bodies as a focal aspect of their skating experience was a figural component of their being-in-the-world. Their sport enjoyment derived

from living the body through various means, such as feeling “weightless,” “stretched,” and/or “right.” The most prominent aspect of this theme was seen in the young athletes’ attempts to make sense of how their body feels at the time of a jump. Bud was very excited when talking about jumping, “You go up in the air! You’ve got this weightless feeling...neat one...weightless...you’re just in the air falling.”

The young participants articulated the opinion that the body in motion was the core of their athletic existence; in other words, that they actualized themselves via their bodies. Therefore, these skaters tended to rely on the feel of the skating maneuver while practicing the skill. Michelle described this process of working towards the “right feeling”:

When I got on the ice after the jump class, my jumps just felt really weird. I couldn’t go up in the air and do it, even a half jump. They just didn’t feel right. My legs sort of felt wrong, really stiff...like they are not a part of [me], and I [couldn’t] feel the jump. It just didn’t feel right. It just didn’t. You can feel it if you do it. But then when I was working on them, I just jumped higher and higher and it got into me finally.

Moreover, Katie elaborated on what could be done to achieve this feeling:

At first I just stroke around the rink and do some turns and everything...and stroke backwards around the rink. It still doesn’t feel quite right because I don’t think my muscles are that warmed up yet. The waltz jump and the loop jump sometimes don’t feel right because they are edge jumps and they aren’t exactly right for me. So I do the toe jumps before I come back to [the edge jumps]...and then it just feels good because my muscles are warmed up from all the other jumps.

#### *Theme Five: Around Other People*

The final theme, *Around Other People*, emerged from two sub-themes, (1) Showing Everyone What I Can Do and (2) Fellow Skaters.

*Showing everyone what I can do.* This sub-theme describes how skating became meaningful and enjoyable in a social context when young skaters could show off their athletic and artistic abilities. “It’s exciting to show what I’m really able to do,” explained Katie. Izzy echoed this sentiment when she said, “I’m showing everyone what I can do. And that’s fun. Fun!” It appeared that the young participants also enjoyed the reciprocity of their interactions with the audience. People’s cheers and their appreciation of the young athletes’ performances were salient to the skaters’ positive experiences in sport. Kayla made the point clearly when she said, “I like people watching me...so they can see how good I’m doing...Everybody’s watching you. Everybody is just so happy for you and cheering for you, and stuff...I enjoy that.”

In return, the participants were thrilled to give aesthetic pleasure to the crowd by performing for them, “It’s a show for the people. There are people everywhere watching you...and you are performing for them. I like doing that” (Izzy).

*Fellow skaters.* The presence of other skaters had a multidimensional motivational effect on the young athletes. More experienced skaters were perceived as role models who motivated the

participants' attempts to excel in figure skating. Cassy, for example, started skating because she saw her older cousin who had skated for ten years "doing it." Cassy further revealed that she "really looked up to her [cousin]." Similarly, Jonathan, whose two older siblings were skaters, enjoyed "racing and playing tag with them at skating sessions" once he began skating. He further stated, "Now I have to work really hard. My brother and sister do, too." Moreover, Kayla elaborated on her experience of having "a really close friend" who is also a higher level skater:

She showed me Junior level stuff and that made me feel special...One day she's going to be in the Olympics...and I'm gonna know someone who's in the Olympics, and I think it's just really neat...She's been skating for a lot, lot, lot longer than I have. And she is skating better. But I'm getting better and catching up.

Another facet of interactions with peer skaters that added enjoyment to the participants' sport experiences was "just skating together" and "supporting each other." According to Katie, "I feel good when they [fellow skaters] are cheering for me." Michelle also liked the experience of doing a "spotlight with a friend." Izzy, in describing her performance experience as "putting out a show on the ice," expressed the feeling that "maybe, I think it now, the part that I really liked about being in it [was] that my friends were there and we were just skating together..."

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to begin to understand the experience of enjoyment in figure skating from the point of view of the child. For my participants enjoyment was embodied in the global themes of doing something for the *First Time*, *Getting Better*, *Being Creative*, *Experiencing the Body*, and being around *Other People*. As an abstract category, enjoyment was very difficult to define. In their attempts to describe joyful experiences in skating, the young athletes referred to a nice, good, and powerful feeling elicited by immersion in and intense concentration on the activity, stimulation of senses, rhythmic movements, and imaginative interpretation of music. For some participants, skating enjoyment was manifested as volatile explosive energy when they felt dynamically excited and exuberant. Others, on the other hand, experienced greater enjoyment when they were in a flow-like state, feeling competent and letting their bodies move freely and effortlessly, expressing their emotional inner worlds through movements. In the young athletes' words, skating enjoyment is like "cartwheels on ice" or the feeling one wants to keep "as long as it will last."

Consistent with previous research findings that youth sport enjoyment stems primarily from achievement-related factors (Brustad, 1988; Scanlan & Simons, 1992; Scanlan, et al., 1993; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985a), my participants perceived their accomplishment of something for the first time, getting better through learning new skills and working towards the achievement of mastery goals, and seeing mastery and competitive outcomes to be enjoyable. The global theme *First Time* indicates that learning new skills is linked to feelings of competence and perceived control and is a major source of enjoyment for children between ages of 8 and 10. This finding has a practical significance in light of Harter's (1981) competence motivation theory, which posits that children's affective or emotional states derived from the perceptions of competence and control directly influence their motivation. Coaches working with this developmental group, therefore, should foster skills development in such a way that balances the skill's level of

difficulty with abilities of the athlete. Breaking down the complex skill into a number of manageable tasks might enhance the child's perceived competence, which in turn will increase the young athlete's achievement motivation.

Much of the sport psychology literature indicates that extrinsic motivational factors can potentially undermine long-term fulfillment in sport (Kleiber, 1981; Wankel & Sefton, 1989). For the young skaters in my study, however, it appeared that internal and external motivational factors were not mutually exclusive categories but rather interacted to affect their experiences of sport enjoyment. For example, the theme *Getting Better* (i.e., mastery) encompassed two sub-themes, Practice Hard and Hard Work Pays Off, which clearly reflect both internal and external motivational orientations. Recent literature suggests that self-regulated behaviors, such as learning and mastery, are significant predictors of youth sport enjoyment (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Scanlan, et al., 1993). However, while the implication is that mastery is a form of intrinsically motivated behavior, the presented results suggest that mastery may be comprised of both internally (i.e., Practice Hard) and externally (i.e., Hard Work Pays Off) regulated components that become figural in the experience of skating enjoyment at different times. To date, multidimensional nature of mastery has emerged only in the study of elite adult figure skaters conducted by Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989).

Scanlan and colleagues (1993), Wankel & Kreisel (1985a, 1985b) and Weiss (1995) have further suggested that social factors, such as “being on the team,” “being with friends,” and “significant others,” play a key role in young athletes' experience of enjoyment. The presented results provide a rich description of how the context of other people contributes to the meaning and enjoyment of skating for young athletes. My participants expressed the importance of affiliation with fellow skaters and the enjoyment they derived from “supporting each other” and “cheering for” each other. Moreover, they were clearly aware of, but not intimidated by, older and/or higher level skaters. While Kleiber (1981) suggests that enjoyment may be diminished in the presence of others, namely “coaches, parents, friends or spectators in general” (p. 81), the young skaters in this study seemed to see their own improvement as a “work-in-progress” that benefited from both instructional feedback and the appreciation of others (i.e., instructors, peers, and spectators). In addition, they offered a glimpse of another social aspect of the phenomenon of sport enjoyment—the skaters' relatedness to the audience. Put simply, these young athletes enjoyed skating when others were watching them. It should be noted that performance recognition as a source of enjoyment has also been found to be prominent in the experiences of elite figure skaters (Scanlan, et al., 1989). Perhaps, future research should look into a possible link between the skill level and the affect derived from performing in front of the spectators.

A previously unreported theme of youth sport enjoyment that emerged in my study was *Being Creative*. The creative element was evident in the solution to technical tasks, the invention of skating moves, and the interpretation of music. One possible explanation for the enjoyable experience of creativity within a structured environment like competitive figure skating is that music and artistic expression are integral parts of the competitive and judging process. Though results of a phenomenological inquiry cannot be generalized to other individuals or groups, coaches working with young figure skaters (and potentially with gymnasts, artistic roller skaters and rhythmic gymnasts) are encouraged to create spaces in the structured environment of organized sports for young athletes to explore and develop their own creative self-expressive and

problem-solving resources. This can be achieved, for example, by including young athletes in decision making pertaining to music and choreography of their routines.

Finally, consistent with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of the body as a fundamental category of human existence, the young athletes in my study exhibited a keen awareness of the body that served as the focal point of their enjoyment in figure skating. Within the framework of existentialism, lived experience provides the existential basis for humans' being-in-the-world. In other words, the body is viewed as a site of knowledge, action and intention (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Moran, 2000). This finding is exciting because young athletes challenged Cartesian dualism, revealing their engagement with the world through their bodies. Hence acknowledging how bodily existence is related to enjoyment is a crucial factor in understanding how the athletes enjoy skating. The implication for practitioners based on this theme is to encourage young athletes to utilize and rely on different senses in the process of achieving technical mastery. By developing a kinesthetic awareness and/or "feel" for their sport, children may experience enjoyment derived from sports participation even more fully.

In closing, participation in various youth sports programs appears to be beneficial for children's healthy development (Weiss, 1995). Specifically, young children's thriving psychosocial development at this stage largely depends on achieving the basic strength of competence (Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1981). Sports setting provides ample opportunities for children to test their abilities and master new skills, increasing their sense of competence and self-worth. Nonetheless, the benefits derived from sports participation do not occur automatically. In order for them to happen, coaches, sport psychology professionals, and parents need to thoughtfully plan and adequately structure sporting programs. It is my hope that greater understanding of what makes children's involvement in sport enjoyable will assist the interested adults in improving the overall quality of children's experiences in sport.

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