

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Exploring the Motivational Profiles of Amateur Triathletes

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By
Kim Hollingdale

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The thesis of Kim Hollingdale is approved:

Dr. Omar Ruvalcaba

Date

Dr. Ashley A. Samson

Date

Dr. Mark P. Otten, Chair

Date

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Abstract

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This study examined data from 594 triathletes of a variety of backgrounds, to identify existing motivational state differences between male and female triathletes, long course versus short course triathletes, and ‘top performing’ versus ‘participating for pleasure’ triathletes. Data was gathered via a digital questionnaire that included popular, pre-validated motivation assessment measures - the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSF), the Exercise Regulation Questionnaire (BREQ-3) and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS-28).

Utilizing t-test statistical analyses, significant motivational profile differences were identified between male and female triathletes and top performing versus ‘just’ participating athletes. Mean comparisons suggested that male triathletes are less self-determined than their female counterparts, placing greater motivational emphasis on extrinsic, rather than intrinsic factors, while female athletes reported higher levels of need frustration. Multiple significant differences were also found in the motivational profiles of top performing triathletes when compared to those that were participating for pleasure, including on BREQ-3 subscales (External Regulation; Identified regulation; Integrated Regulation), SMS-28 (Extrinsic Introjected; Extrinsic Identified), and BPNSF subscales (Autonomy Frustration; Relatedness Frustration; Competence Satisfaction; Competence Frustration).

Post hoc examination revealed that the top performing athletes scored higher than ‘just participating’ athletes on five BREQ-3 subscales (Amotivation, External Regulation, Identified Regulation, Integrated Regulation, Intrinsic Regulation), four SMS-28 subscales (Intrinsic motivation to accomplish; Extrinsic motivation to experience; Extrinsic External Regulation; Amotivation) and five BPNSF subscales (Autonomy Satisfaction: Autonomy Frustration; Relatedness Frustration; Competence Satisfaction; Competence Frustration).

The study suggests that a far greater variety of motivational profiles are already present amongst the triathlon community than may have been previously assumed. The identification of a motivational profile that correlates with greater success lays the groundwork for research-informed training programs that could potentially aid athletes in performance improvements.

Introduction

What is Motivation?

Motivation can be defined as “a process whereby goal-directed activity is energized and sustained” (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 49), while a motive has been defined as “an unobserved inner force that stimulates, compels, and directs a certain behavior response” (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2016, p. 130). The history of motivation theory can be traced back through the field of psychology to a founding father of psychotherapy – Freud. Freud and many others of his time were generating “drive” theories, theories proposing that human behavior was driven by the inherent survival needs with which they were born – sexual, physical and psychological.

However, as investigation and understanding of human motivation evolved, limitations of these drive theories emerged. It became clear that drive theory, as Freud and his contemporaries conceptualized it, could only adequately explain reactive behavior, generated by unsatisfied need, and did not explain proactive behavior that appeared unrelated to already met basic survival needs (Lamont & Kennelly, 2012).

In the late 1950’s, Harvard psychologist Robert White proposed that there was a different type of need – not born, not inherent, but developed. That need was for competence in interacting with our environment. This proposal ultimately formed the basis of what we now refer to as “intrinsic motivation” – an understanding that behavior could be motivated not just by physical survival needs such as to eat or drink, or by external stimuli such as danger or safety cues, but by internalized desires to attain a host of psychological rewards (Lamont & Kennelly, 2012).

For the next 20 years, the intrinsic-extrinsic motivation dichotomy was the most popular debate regarding behavioral drivers, acknowledging the ability of humans to be prompted into action by both internal and external stimuli. This dichotomy paved the way for

the more sophisticated motivational theories that remain prominent today, particularly that of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Lamont & Kennelly, 2012). SDT is a theoretical framework that proposes that humans are motivated to grow and change by universal psychological needs rather than by purely external stimuli of reward or punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory

The basic psychological needs that SDT proposes drive the human propensity toward growth, interpersonal development and personal wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000) are as follows:

- 1) The need for autonomy (the experience of choice and feeling of ownership over one's behavior),
- 2) The need for competency (the experience of feeling effective when desired outcomes are attained) and,
- 3) The need for social relatedness (the experience of caring for and being cared for by others and feeling an emotional connection with others (Schuler et al, 2010).

SDT holds that these three basic psychological needs are the key to understanding goals – of all kinds – that are pursued by humans, and that humans naturally interact with their inner and outer environments and will engage in interesting activities in the absence of external stimuli (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Based on this understanding, SDT sets out a continuum of motivational states that may stimulate human behavior and impact the pursuit of goals to varying degrees. The continuum identifies three motivational types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation, and places them on a continuum of self-determination from least to greatest. Amotivation is a category describing an apparent absence of motivation of any kind and is

considered the least self-determined. Extrinsic motivation is a type of motivation that SDT further breaks down into subcategories of different levels of self-determination.

At the lowest end of the self-determination continuum within extrinsic motivation is *external regulation*, a state in which behavior is stimulated by external stimuli, particularly reward or threat of punishment – for example, anger from your coach or teammates when you miss practice or underperform. *Introjected regulation* is the next ranked motivational subtype and it describes the state in which behavior is motivated by contingent consequences imposed by individuals on themselves – e.g., feelings of guilt, shame or missing out when one misses a training session or underperforms. *Identified regulation* describes the state in which the individual judges the behavior as important and therefore performs it out of choice, such as attending practices because the individual believes that is important to them and their goals. Identified regulation is considered to involve greater self-determination than the previously mentioned forms of extrinsic motivation (López-Fernández et al., 2014). However, the strongest form of extrinsic motivation is known as *integrated regulation*, the state in which the individual not only endorses the purpose or value of the behavior, but fully integrates into their lifestyle and personality.

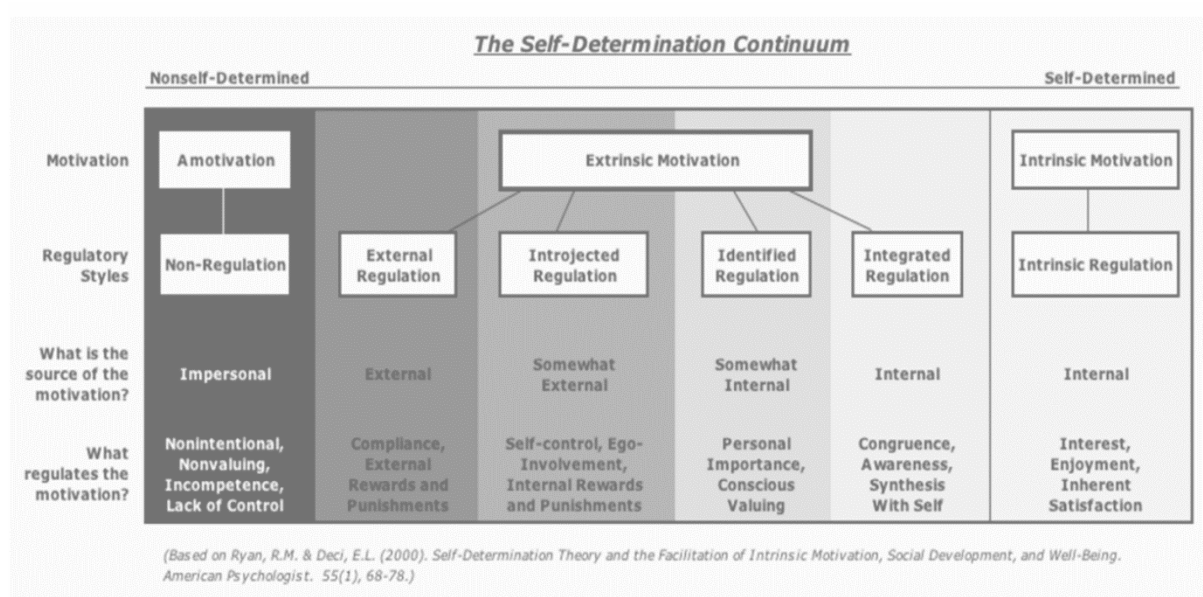
Intrinsic motivation describes a state in which motivation is driven from within the individual rather than initiated by an external mechanism. This motivational type offers the greatest degree of self-determination on the continuum (see Figure 1.0). Typically, within SDT, intrinsic motivation can belong to one of three subtypes:

- 1) Intrinsic motivation to *know*, which can be explained as performing an activity for the satisfaction one experiences while learning, exploring, or trying to understand new concepts (López-Fernández et al., 2014).

2) Intrinsic motivation to *accomplish*, which refers to motivation generated from the satisfaction and enjoyment of creating something, developing new abilities that exceed the current ones or attempting to reach personal objectives (López-Fernández et al., 2014).

3) Intrinsic motivation to *experience stimulation* occurs when an individual engages in an activity to experience stimulating sensations (López-Fernández et al., 2014).

Figure 1.0 The Self Determination Continuum as sourced from Ryan & Deci, 2000.



Motivation Theory in Sports

The realm of sport is a natural candidate as a field within which to study the topic of motivation. As Ryan and Deci (2000) noted, sport and exercise epitomize motivation because the involved activities require exertion, energy, focus, and discipline. The activity and goal focus that is inherent in any sport, makes it an ideal environment in which to capture motivation data, to better understand how motivational approaches differ between individuals, and to ask if different motivational strategies can meaningfully contribute to achieving different performance outcomes. In a review of studies that investigated motives for participation in sport and exercise across sports, Hagger and Chatzisarantis (2007)

observed a general trend for participation to be more (but not exclusively) intrinsically motivated.

Given the regularity of the presence of these autonomous motivational types within this large review of studies, it might be easy to assume that the majority of sports participation is driven by intrinsic motivation. However, a number of studies have reported findings of sport participation being motivated by *self-determined* types, such as to please others and to gain financial or status rewards (Alexandris et al, 2007). With college scholarships, professional athletic salaries, high social status, and popularity on the line, it is certainly easy to understand how external stimuli could also be driving sports participation for many. Additionally, some studies have noted that the motivational forces driving sport participation may covary with individual identity factors, such as gender (Nuñez et al., 2007). This ensures that as a collective, the research field has yet to determine a singular motivational type that drives participation in sport and indicates that the consideration of athletes as one homogenous group would be a significant error. Further understanding of what drives the participation of athletes of all identities is a clear target for future research endeavors.

Motivation and Sport Performance

As described, the existing literature base indicates that individual athletes may have their own relatively unique set of motivational factors that encourage their engagement in sport, with no clear motivational type “frontrunner”. However, evidence is more suggestive of a dominant motivational type when it comes to high performance within sport participation. Studies that have considered the link between motivation and sports performance have highlighted that intrinsic motivation during training sessions is positively associated with subsequent performance (Gillet, Berjot & Gobancé, 2009). This suggests that while participation can be driven by a motivation from much of the self-determination

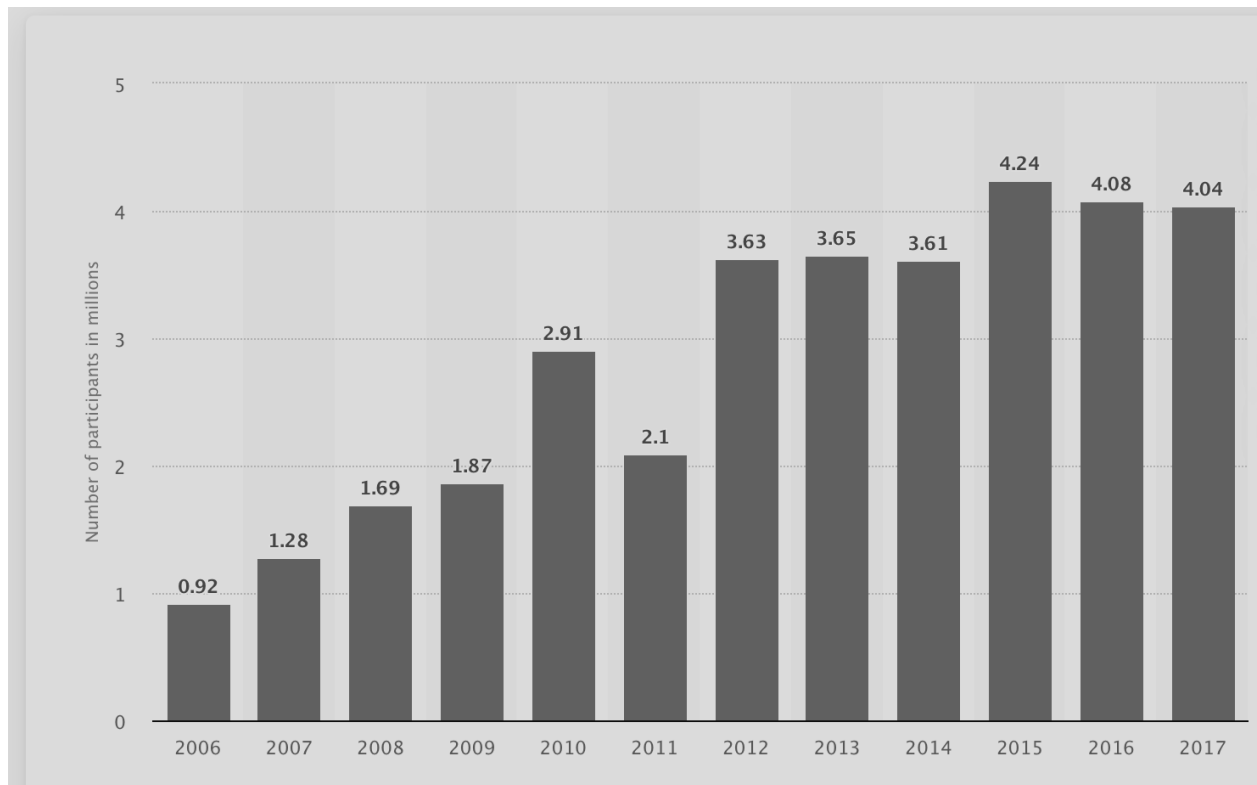
continuum, high performance may be related to a specific motivational style. The current study pursues this avenue of investigation – what motivates participation and superior performance, specifically within the sport of triathlon.

Sport Specific Motivation - Triathlon

Triathlon is a growing sport (see Figure 2.0) that combines the three disciplines of swimming, cycling, and running in that order. Competitions commonly last anywhere between 2 and 16 hours depending on the competition distance, which is typically one of four course types – 15 mile ‘Sprint’, 32 mile ‘Olympic’, 70.3 mile ‘Half Ironman’ or 140.6 mile ‘Ironman’. Regardless of the distance, training for a multi-sport event such as triathlon is very demanding as each discipline typically requires a minimum of two training sessions per week. Training for such an event, which can require up to 12 months of consistent effort and registering for an event up to 24 months in advance, requires perseverance and a high commitment (Bales, Bales, Deakon & Johnson, 2012).

Figure 2.0: The growth of triathlon sourced from Statista.com 2006

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/191339/participants-in-triathlons-in-the-us-since-2006/>



During prolonged training efforts, athletes may face any number of adversities that can test their commitment, including exhaustion and fatigue from training loads, competitive pressure from a coach, teammates and/or self, injury woes and even financial challenges (Nixdorf, Frank & Beckmann, 2016; Reardon & Factor, 2010). Each athlete has their reasons and motivation for participating in the sport – reasons and motivations that often change during a season. As referenced by Ryan & Deci (2005), triathletes experience intrinsic motivation interspersed with periods of extrinsic motivation. Given the potential adversity that can face triathletes, those that complete a training cycle, and a planned race event must maintain their motivation in some form, perhaps more so than in a sport with fewer demands (Galli & Vealey, 2008).

Despite the sport of triathlon presenting an opportunity to study what are assumed to be relatively long term and high levels of motivation, research to date consists of only a small number of studies that have examined what motivates triathletes specifically (Friel & Vance, 2013; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012). These studies, like those previously referenced with regard

to participation in sports more generally, identified that triathletes were motivated to participate in triathlon commonly but not exclusively for intrinsic reasons, with extrinsic motives also being prevalent.

Motives cited by triathletes within these studies included:

- “To test one’s skills against nature, others and myself” (Friel & Vance, 2013)
- To push limits
- To improve physical fitness
- Mental conditioning
- Challenge
- Goal achievement and improvement
- A sense of accomplishment
- A way to get or stay in shape
- To improve on previous results and to inspire others (Lamont & Kennelly, 2012)

Lovett (2011) found that triathletes participating in sprint distance triathlons were motivated by affiliation, life meaning, personal goals, achievement, competition and self-esteem. Myburgh’s 2014 study results endorsed socialization, competition, well-being and love of the sport as the main motives of triathlon participants.

Motivation in Female Versus Male Triathletes

The aforementioned research clearly indicates that it has not been possible to identify one homogenous motivational profile of a triathlete. As a result, it is now important, for the sport, its current athletes and its future participants, that the field moves away from attempting to identify a singular motivational profile for athletes in this sport and rather attempts to better understand what individual differences between athletes contribute to the

variety of motives present in the community. The research field has begun this process by exploring the differences in motivation between male and female athletes, with mixed results.

Several studies have reported higher intrinsic motivation and lower extrinsic motivation amongst female athletes as compared to male athletes (Pelletier, Tuson, Fortier, Vallerand, Brière & Blais, 1995). Alternate studies have replicated these lower scores on extrinsic motivation and amotivation in women versus their male counterparts but have been unable to identify any differences in intrinsic motivation between the sexes (Nunez, Martín-Albo, Navarro & González, 2006). A further study concluded that motivational profiles of athletes from 25 different sports, at different competition levels, were not associated with gender in any meaningful way (Vlachopoulos et al., 2000). The contrary evidence that these studies present indicates that further research is required to generate a meaningful conclusion regarding how gender identity may drive people to engage in the sport of triathlon. Research regarding non-binary or transgender athletes and triathletes, specifically, is in extremely limited supply.

At the time of writing, little research has been published comparing the motivational profiles of elite triathletes versus the far larger population of amateur athletes in the sport, or between those of different performance levels within the amateur field (e.g., the top 20% of race finishers versus others). Recognition and appreciation of the different motivational styles that exist within the triathlon community, and a better understanding of identity factors that may correlate with them, may aid the sport in becoming more welcoming to a variety of athletes. This might include those that may not identify with the image most promoted by the sport of triathlon – the impossibly fit superhuman, Ironman World Championship finishers that compete in Kona each year.

Current Study

The current study explores the variety of motivational profiles that exist amongst participants in the sport of triathlon. Results aim to enable the triathlon community to better meet the needs (support, training, and marketing) of these specific profiles, as well as encourage the sport to be more accessible to a range of identities. The specific objectives of this study included achieving a better understanding of the motivation of athletes to compete in the sport, and learning if gender, selected race distance (short or long), or participation purpose (participation versus competition for top 20% placement) were correlated with specific motivational styles.

Hypotheses

Evidence has already established that triathletes are not a homogenous group in terms of their motivations for participation in the sport. The current study aimed to identify more individualized motivational approaches by testing the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis one

Motivational profiles of triathletes will vary by gender (male, female, transgender), with male triathletes reporting greater extrinsic motivation to participate than female or transgender triathletes.

Hypothesis two

Motivational profiles of triathletes will vary by purpose of sport engagement (participation versus competitive placement), with those seeking competitive placement reporting higher levels of extrinsic motivation than triathletes not seeking competitive placement.

Hypothesis three

Motivational profiles of triathletes will vary by triathlon event distance (Sprint, Olympic, 70.3 and 140.6 distance), with longer distance athletes reporting higher intrinsic motivation than short distance triathletes.

Method

Participants

Participants were volunteers that self-identified as triathletes, were 18 years or older and living in the United States. Participants were predominantly recruited through social media by posting details of the study and requesting volunteer participants within popular triathlon focused Facebook groups including Women for Tri, Pathetic Triathletes and Ironman Races, and through solicitation of members of in person Triathlon Clubs, such as Los Angeles Tri Club, Golden Gate Tri Club, New York Tri Club etc, to which the primary researcher had connections following years participating in the sport of triathlon. The goal for this study was to recruit a total of 500 participants with approximately equal number of male and female participants, competitive versus non-competitive athletes, and long and short distance athletes. The study ultimately recruited 594 participants and completed analysis on the full data from 472 participants. Of the 472 participants, 151 were males, 315 females and 6 identified as non-binary people. In terms of performance level, 206 participants typically placed in the top 25 per cent of athletes when they raced and were identified as ‘competitive performers’ versus 266 athletes that race to participate, and 197 participants typically raced in the short distance category (Sprint and Olympic distances), and 258 typically participated in long course events (70.3 and Ironman distance) with 17 reporting non-standard distance racing.

Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods, two stage methodology. In the first phase of the study, participants were recruited to complete a digital questionnaire designed to capture data regarding each participant’s motivational style, triathlon participation levels (training time,

number of races per year, race distances and race placements) and demographic information (age, sex). Participants' time commitment was approximately ten minutes in a single sitting.

The second phase of the study then followed up with individual participants from the sample that represented each of the target groups. Interviews were performed by phone, video or email to generate more context about these participants' questionnaire responses.

Materials

The first phase of the study utilized three pre-existing measures to assess motives and motivational styles within sport: the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSNF) (Chen et al., 2015) see Appendix One, the Exercise Regulations Questionnaire (BREQ-3) see Appendix Two, and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS-28) (Pelletier et al., 1995), see Appendix Three.

The BPNSNF is documented as a reliable and valid measure of wellbeing and was selected because studies found that the three basic psychological need satisfactions assessed, namely, autonomy, relatedness, and competence, contributed to psychological well-being for participants from diverse countries. Furthermore, these relations were not moderated by individual differences in how strongly people valued or desired need satisfaction. These results suggest that the satisfaction of the basic needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are essential nutrients for optimal human functioning across individual and cultural differences. Cronbach's alpha values are reported to be above 0.70 with adequate levels of temporal stability.

The BREQ-3 measures motivation to participate (or not) in exercise. It was selected because it has good psychometric qualities with Cronbach's alpha values of between 0.66 and 0.87. Similarly, the SMS-28 measures reasons for current sport participation. It was selected because it has been assessed to be of high psychometric quality, with subscale Cronbach's alpha ratings between .71 and .80, making this a valid measure for this study.

Upon completion of the digital survey including the aforementioned measures, a small number of participants were invited to participate in the second phase of the study - brief interviews. Phase two follow up interviews followed the interview guide below (Figure 3.0) which includes questions designed to further explore the drivers of engagement in the sport and athlete's level of self-awareness regarding their own motivations to participate. This additional information assisted in developing greater understanding of athlete motivation, following thematic analysis.

Figure 3.0 - Interview guide

Focus of questions	Interview question
Experiences and behaviors	What initially motivated you to begin triathlon and does that differ from what motivates your continued engagement in the sport currently?
Opinions and values	What do you think motivates most triathletes? What makes a successful triathlete? How do you feel that you fit in the triathlete community or the typical triathlete profile?
Feelings	Tell me about the emotions you experience when you train and race in triathlon.
Knowledge	Do you actively think about your motivation level during a training program?
Sensory observations	Do you tune in to your physical sensation when you train and race or tune out?

Procedures

During the digital questionnaire in phase one of this research study, participants were asked to voluntarily provide a contact email address if they were willing to be contacted for a

follow up interview on the research topic. This email information was then separated from the data and stored in an “identifier only” file. The identity-only data set contained the email addresses and to the key to the identity code that can be used to link with the coded set. The coded data set refers to data that has been stripped of identifiers and assigned an identity code which will not offer any clue as to the identity of an individual.

Participants in the interview phase of the study committed to one 10-minute conversation.

Analysis

Upon conclusion of phase one of the study, data was analyzed to identify motivational profiles indicated by the included assessments. To address the quantitative hypotheses, the primary investigator used a series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) using SPSS 27, a statistical software package.

Following the second phase of the study, a thematic analysis was conducted to explore patterns across the qualitative data provided via the participant interviews.

Results

Statistical Analysis

This study gathered data from 594 triathletes (ultimately reduced to 472 following data screening procedures indicated below) to identify existing motivational state differences between male and female triathletes, long course versus short course triathletes, and ‘top performing’ versus ‘participating for pleasure’ triathletes.

Data was gathered via a digital questionnaire that included popular, pre-validated motivation assessment measures - the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSF), the Exercise Regulation Questionnaire (BREQ-3) and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS-28).

Data Screening

Prior to running inferential statistical analysis, data screening identified a significant number of participants that had not completed survey items that contribute to the core psychological measures employed in this study – the BREQ-3, SMS-28 and BPNSF scales. Upon removing participants with incomplete data on these three critical scales, the final number of participants for further analysis was 472.

Normality testing of the study variables alerted to skewness and kurtosis (and thus outlier) concerns on the total score variables for the BPNSF and the BREQ-3. Using a Mahalanobis distance critical value of 11.345 (significance level of $p > .001$) ten potential outlier cases were identified. The data of these participants was then reviewed to ensure no input errors/erroneous answers were provided. Upon confirming that all answers appeared within the realms of the scale, the researcher made the decision to keep all remaining data as any identified ‘outlier’ scores were to be considered a proper part of the population being assessed.

Cronbach's alpha scores were assessed for each of the three core measures employed in the study and the results were as follows: the SMS-28 alpha was .895; the BPNSF alpha was .829; the BREQ-3 alpha was .839.

Group comparisons

Utilizing *t*-test statistical analyses, significant motivational profile differences were identified between male and female triathletes and top performing versus 'just' participating athletes.

Male Versus Female

Male and female triathletes differed significantly on the total BREQ-3 score ($t = 2.884, p < .05$), but no significant difference was identified in total score on the SMS-28 ($t = .342, p = .732$) or BPNSF measure ($t = -.133, p = .447$).

In post hoc comparisons of the subscales of the three assessments, significant differences between male and female participants were identified on three subscales of the BREQ-3, External Regulation ($t = -1.874, p < .05$) and Identified regulation ($t = -2.078, p < .05$) and Integrated Regulation ($t = -1.63, p < .05$).

Significant differences were also noted on four subscales of the BPNSF: Autonomy Frustration ($t = -2.64, p < .05$), Relatedness Frustration ($t = -2.86, p < .05$), Competence Satisfaction ($t = 2.86, p < .05$) and Competence Frustration ($t = -3.47, p < .05$).

Further significant differences were identified on two subscales of the SMS-28. These differences were noted on the subscales of Extrinsic Introjected ($t = 2.15, p < .05$) and Extrinsic Identified ($t = -2.70, p < .05$).

Post hoc comparisons suggested that the motivational profiles of male triathletes are less self-determined than their female counterparts, placing greater motivational emphasis on extrinsic, rather than intrinsic factors, while female athletes reported higher levels of need frustration.

Table 1.0: Male versus Female Triathlete Motivational Scale Comparisons

	Male Vs Female
SMS-28 total	$t = .359, p > .05$
Extrinsic Introjected	$t = 2.15, p < .05$
Extrinsic Identified	$t = -2.70, p < .05$
BREQ-3 total	$t = 2.844, p < .05$
External Regulation	$t = -1.874, p < .05$
Identified Regulation	$t = -2.078, p < .05$
Integrated Regulation	$t = -1.63, p < .05$
BPNSF total	$t = -.133, p > .05$
Autonomy Frustration	$t = -2.64, p < .05$
Relatedness Frustration	$t = -2.86, p < .05$
Competence Satisfaction	$t = 2.86, p < .05$
Competence Frustration	$t = -3.47, p < .05$

Top Performing Vs Participating Athletes

Multiple significant differences were also found in the motivational profiles of top performing triathletes when compared to those that were participating for pleasure. The total scores for each employed assessment measure, was significantly different between the two groups – BREQ-3 ($t = 4.296, p < .05$), SMS-28 ($t = 2.29, p < .05$) and the BPNSF ($t = 3.37, p < .05$).

Post Hoc investigation identified further significant differences on the majority of subscales including five BREQ-3 subscales: Amotivation ($t = -1.84, p < .05$), External Regulation ($t = -2.55, p < .05$) Identified Regulation ($t = 2.75, p < .05$), Integrated Regulation ($t = 3.85, p < .001$), Intrinsic Regulation ($t = 4.08, p < .001$); four SMS-28 subscales: Intrinsic motivation to accomplish ($t = 2.50, p < .05$), Extrinsic motivation to experience ($t = 3.20, p < .001$), Extrinsic External Regulation ($t = 2.28, p < .05$), Amotivation ($t = -1.92, p < .05$); and five BPNSF subscales: Autonomy Satisfaction ($t = 3.80, p = .001$), Autonomy Frustration ($t = -2.14, p < .05$), Relatedness Frustration ($t = -2.5, p < .05$), Competence Satisfaction ($t = 3.72, p < .001$) and Competence Frustration ($t = -4.04, p < .001$).

Table 2.0: Top Performing versus Participating Triathlete Motivational Scale Comparisons

	Top performing Vs Participating Athletes
SMS-28 total	$t = 2.29, p < .05$
Intrinsic motivation to accomplish	$t = 2.50, p < .05$
Extrinsic motivation to experience	$t = 3.20, p < .001$
Extrinsic External Regulation	$t = 2.28, p < .05$
Amotivation	$t = -1.92, p < .05$
BREQ-3 total	$t = 4.296, p < .05$
Amotivation	$t = -1.84, p < .05$
External Regulation	$t = -2.55, p < .05$
Identified Regulation	$t = 2.75, p < .05$
Integrated Regulation	$t = 3.85, p < .001$
Intrinsic Regulation	$t = 4.08, p < .001$
BPNSF total	$t = 3.37, p < .05$
Autonomy Satisfaction	$t = 3.80, p = .001$
Autonomy Frustration	$t = -2.14, p < .05$
Relatedness Frustration	$t = -2.5, p < .05$
Competence Satisfaction	$t = 3.72, p < .001$
Competence Frustration	$t = -4.04, p < .001$

Post hoc examination revealed that the top performing athletes scored higher than ‘just participating’ athletes on the measures of self-determined motivational styles and scored lower than ‘just participating’ athletes on the two BPNSF frustration scales.

Long Vs. Short Course Athletes

No significant differences were noted between the assessment score totals of athletes that competed specifically in short versus long course triathlon (SMS-28 $t = -.933, p = .176$; BREQ-3 $t = -.703, p = .241$; BPNSF $t = -1.00, p = .162$). Although, in assessing subscales comparisons, significant differences were noted on the BREQ3 subscale, Intrinsic Regulation ($t = -2.12, p < .05$) and SMS-28’s Intrinsic Motivation - To Know ($t = .467, p < .05$).

Follow Up Interviews: Content Analysis

In an initial review of the interview transcripts, categories of common data across multiple participants were identified. These categories were then reviewed in a second examination of the transcripts to clarify their accuracy, and where appropriate, grouped into larger themes as identified in table 3.0.

Table 3.0: Identified Interview Content Themes
1. Reasons for participating in triathlon
1.1.1. Fill a void/purpose/structure
1.1.2. Challenge myself/ see if I could
1.1.3. Health
1.1.4. Sport motivation changes over time
1.1.5. Longevity
2. Community
2.1.1. Inclusive community
2.1.2. Lack of community – minority group members
2.1.3. Community related to motivation
2.1.4. Not the stereotyped triathlete
2.1.5. Self-comparison to stereotype
3. Successful triathlete definition
3.1.1. Trying
3.1.2. Discipline
3.1.3. Making it a lifestyle
4. Motivational cycles
4.1.1. Training – changeable motivation
4.1.2. Races – celebration
4.1.3. Sport motivation changes over time
5. Goals
5.1.1. Incremental improvement
5.1.2. Goal setting
5.1.3. Self-discipline vs motivation
6. Mind-body
6.1.1. Tune in to physical sensation
7. Benefits:
7.1.1. Mental Health

Upon finalizing the themes considered apparent in the interview data, excerpts that illustrate the themes and their relationships to the research questions were identified as below.

Reasons for participating in triathlon

Interviewees were asked to articulate their reasons for pursuing the sport of triathlon, with the question: “What initially motivated you to begin triathlon and does that differ from what motivates your continued engagement in the sport currently?”

Responses of course varied, but clear themes were identified including the desire to 1) provide purpose, 2) provide challenge 3) care for health.

Fill a void/purpose/structure

Athletes that identified engaging in triathlon to provide themselves with a purpose made reference to seeking and enjoying the structure of training requirements of the sport and felt that being a part of the triathlon sport filled a ‘void’.

“I was a two-sport college athlete and I’ve always been wired for competition, but when you’re done with athletics and there’s not a professional path for you, you look for something to fill that void”

“It helps to keep me in check, to keep a schedule and routine and I am a very routines person”.

“My whole identity had become being a stay-at-home mother and so...I do a race to have something for myself”

“I had fallen into some addictive behaviors and needed something to provide a path and purpose to get in shape”

Challenge myself/ see if I could/health

“I think it’s just ... proving to myself that I’m still alive. My half ironman was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. I never thought I could do any of this.”

“My initial motivation was to challenge myself to do things I wasn’t really sure I could do.”

“I was going through a time in my life when I was drinking a lot and triathlon training was something I could lean on to protect my health – I can't drink too much, I've got training in the morning”.

“My motivation was just kind of to be healthy.”

Longevity

Other interviewees identified reasons that they pursued the sport of triathlon – as opposed to alternative sports that could offer purpose, challenge, and health benefits and these were grouped into a clear theme that the sport of triathlon, due to its variety, offers longevity to athletes that other sports might not provide.

“I think as you get into middle age it's awfully nice to have something you can do successfully for a long time. Triathlon is not just brute force, it's also mental, how long can I hang in there?”

“I can race casually in my 60s, 70s and 80s because it's not just one sport you naturally get that cross-training effect so it's about longevity and cross training and not getting burnout”

A further theme regarding motivation emerged in the interviews – that the initial motivational nudge or urge often altered over time and participants' motivations evolved during their engagement. While the changes varied to such a degree that no coherent theme could be identified during the thematic analysis, this pattern of the sport providing multiple reasons to pursue it was a common thread and may be reflective of the variety that a multi-sport provides.

Community

The second thematic grouping identified regards the community that surrounds the sport of triathlon.

Inclusive community

Researcher bias identified prior to interviews was the expectation that most participant triathletes would feel marginalized by the triathlon community. However, responses indicated that it is in fact the feeling of inclusivity in the community of triathlon that stands out and encourages the commitment of most interviewees.

“My opinion is that triathlon is one of the most inclusive and inviting sports and I really like that.”

“I stumbled into a open water swim group, found a few likeminded women and it turned in to my community away from home”

“Tri is pretty unique in that amateurs can race alongside pros.”

Community related to motivation

Interview participants report that the degree of community within the field encourages and motivates them:

“I’ve found a great community; it keeps me fit and it builds my self-confidence”.

Not the stereotyped triathlete

Several participants noted that they didn’t consider themselves to be the stereotypical triathlete, but also noted that the stereotype wasn’t reflective of the majority of the sport participants.

“Seeing all the ‘normal people’ racing opened my eyes to the fact that triathlon isn’t just for the super fit, elite athletes but for people of all ages, body types and abilities.”

Lack of community – minority group members

However, notable was the experience of a woman of color that felt left out by triathlon clothing companies that did not meet her needs. This participant reported a sense of ostracism was compounded by her experiences with male dominated training groups.

The interviewer questions if this seeming anomaly is due to the participant’s level of performance – as a front of pack performer, this participant may have found herself within

more elite training environment and lacking the camaraderie of less competitive groupings, in addition to being female, and of color, she holds three factors that put her in a ‘minority’ within the sport.

Successful triathlete definition

In describing what it takes or means to be a successful triathlete, participants endorsed 3 themes – trying (literally trying to Tri was identified as a key criterion for success and participants explained that being successful in the sport did not often require competitive success – rather they felt that simply participating in the practice of the three elements of the multi-sport was in itself success.

Just trying

“Being out there – doing it – that’s success. Just trying.”

Determination was reported as the second criteria of success in the sport. Participants referred to the need to continue with training when it felt good and when it didn’t. The discipline to continue effort when the athlete isn’t feeling energized or excited to workout appears to be considered critical for success

Discipline

“There is a special discipline required to do the less fun foundational work – strength, stretching etc. – to get the most out of the ‘fun’ stuff”

“I try to look at my motivation level as separate from my level of self-discipline. So even on days when I’m not feeling it, I try to lean on my discipline to get the work done.”

Making it a lifestyle

Participants repeatedly highlighted involvement in the triathlon lifestyle being a part of the successful athlete. Building the sport into your life ensures it is an integral part of life rather than a ‘workout’ to get done.

Due to the endurance nature of the sport, participating in an event – even a so-called short distance triathlon, requires for most athletes, a period of training. All participants described a fluctuation in motivational level as they moved through a training cycle, describing training being unpredictable in terms of motivation – sometimes it is high and other times low, often according to multiple external and internal factors.

Motivational Aspects

Motivation during training

“You have to be a really organized person...the sheer number of training hours requires it.”

“It takes so many months to prepare ... and you have good days and bad days. I hired a coach to help keep me accountable and it was really helpful that on a bad day I could reach out to him.”

Motivation during races

For many participants, racing is a time that rather than being pressured and stressful, is a celebration of the work they have previously put in.

Motivational changes over time

An interesting phenomenon was noted in the participant responses regarding the changing motivations for sport participation over time, with it being notably rare for an athlete to report having the same motivations to continue triathlon as they did at the start of their engagement in the sport.

“I absolutely think about my motivation level while training. While I’m preparing for any training session, I’m constantly gauging my motivation level, my willingness to push etc.”

Goals in triathlon

Goal setting

Every participant noted that their engagement in the sport involved the setting and working toward goals – not always performance focused goals, some included setting examples for others, creating structure in their own lives, releasing stress etc. but what was consistent between participant’s goal references, was that there would be a period of goal setting – identifying what they wanted to gain from engagement in the sport.

“You’re like, how do I go from where I am today to getting there. So, you sign up for a local running club, you start doing the same bike training... and the next thing you know, you're a triathlete.”

Incremental improvements

These comments are suggestive of a mindful approach to engagement in this sport regardless of the goals being pursued. It seems that the sport of triathlon is not undertaken unthinkingly.

Secondly, where goals were identified as physical and performance based, the benefit of tracking incremental improvement was noted by several participants. Noting improvements were part of a cycle of motivation that participants endorsed as encouraging continued participation or engagement even when the efforts weren’t feeling enjoyable.

“I just do the thing in front of me, but I do get satisfaction from seeing the times improve over the course of a season. It's really fun to look at your data.”

“You’ve got to be goal oriented and mentally strong.”

Self-discipline Vs motivation

Relatedly, participants noted that consistent engagement in the sport requires more than motivation – which participants noted ebbed and flowed – but that would require self-discipline, to maintain efforts past the initial motivation that started them, or to make training efforts on days, or weeks, when the feeling of motivation has temporarily waned. The waning

of motivation was attributed to a host of life experiences for which nonprofessional athletes also need to manage, such as work stressors and schedules.

Mind-body

Participants noted that part of their practice to perform well in training and in competition was to tune in to physical sensation.

“I am one of those people whose tuning into the physical sensation when I train and race – it's almost. Meditation for myself. I want to sit in with what I'm feeling.”

“When I'm training, I try to tune in to my body as an indication of burnout or early indication of risk or injury.”

Benefits

While the benefits of engaging in the sport of triathlon varied participant to participant, a consistent theme emerged which was participants endorsing the sport as offering a mental health benefit to them.

“I know how much my mental health benefits from having something I'm working on strictly for myself.”

“I've already noticed now that I'm back in training again, just how much better my mood is and how much happier the rest of my family is as well.”

SDT Theory Examination of Interviews

In examining the interview content from a Self Determination Theory perspective, each participant described numerous reasons to pursue their activity in triathlon. Reasons ranged from physical appearance goals on the extrinsically motivated end of the range, to satisfaction of seeing times improve in the middle of the scale, to pride, enjoyment in the activity itself, a sense of accomplishment, and the sport being a part of their lifestyle, on the more intrinsically motivated end.

While the study's hypothesis that different motivational profiles will be identified between male and female participants, long and short distance athletes and competitive versus purely participatory athletes, no clear cut differences were identified via the interview process – in part due to the limited number of interviews that researchers were able to gather and limiting the interviewer to standard questions which prevented probing for further information in response to participant comments.

However, anecdotally, the interviews do demonstrate that the female participants spoke with more frequency about the impact of their sporting endeavors on their family life and responsibilities, and in some cases spoke to the sport being part of an important self-identity that allowed them to be something more than 'mom'.

Male participants were more likely to name their completed and target races by name, than the female participants.

Discussion

Male Versus Female

The study findings indicate a potential motivational profile difference between males and females, with male participants more frequently endorsing extrinsic motivational leanings than their female counterparts. In practice this may have a meaningful impact on the best way to appeal to male versus female athletes when it comes to marketing the sport - potentially leading with race details such as esteemed location and finisher prizes and for female athletes leading more with an emphasis on pursuing a purposeful challenge and identifying community. While both genders demonstrated interest in both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of sport participation, there may be a small nuance in leading priority that could be important for marketing and recruitment efforts. Similarly, motivational profile information could be an important part of successful coaching. Traditionally, triathlon coaching has focused on the goal of faster race times and improved athlete race ranking but if other motivational factors identified in this research, such as feelings of community, self-esteem, competence, and identity could be included in coaching programs the appeal of the sport could be widened further.

Competitive Versus Participant

Post hoc examination revealed that the top performing athletes scored higher than 'just participating' athletes on the measures of self-determined motivational styles and scored lower than 'just participating' athletes on the two BPNSF frustration scales.

While genetics and natural ability may inevitably play a part in distinguishing those that perform at the top end of the sport of triathlon versus those athletes that are participating but tend to be in the second half of race finishers, the present study also indicates that higher levels of performance correlate with a higher level of self-determination regarding motivation, and less frustration of basic psychological needs of competence and relatedness.

While this study is unable to draw conclusions about the direction of the relationship between performance and self-determined motivational level, the identified difference does present an interesting possibility worthy of investigation - does the motivational style contribute to improved performance with these athletes or is it a consequence of better performance. Does motivational style move further along the self-determined spectrum as an athlete experiences success?

Long Versus Short Distance Athletes

The researcher's hypothesis was that longer distances would correlate with a different motivational profile as the distance could require far more motivation to complete. However, the data did not support this hypothesis. The present study was not able to identify any statistically significant difference in motivational profiles between those athletes that were predominantly targeting long course triathlon compared to those that were pursuing the shorter distance triathlons. Within the interviews it seemed clear from participant comments that all distances represented a challenge for the participant and that distance selected may reflect more about the length of time that an athlete has been involved in the sport than a specific motivational data point. While not every respondent reported being interested in pursuing the longest popular distance of triathlon racing - the ironman distance of 140.6 miles - many referenced wanting to complete it at least once at some point in their triathlon career.

Future Research

While the present study adds to the small pool of existing literature regarding motivations amongst triathletes, it also poses numerous follow up questions that could benefit from future examination. The present study attempted to understand if different athletes had different motivational profiles - in examining the different motivational profiles of athletes that were finishing races in the top 25% of participants versus those that were more likely to finish in the bottom 25%, the hope might have been to identify a difference and then run a follow up experiment to see if the motivational approach was responsible in part for the performance level, i.e. if an athlete could be trained in to a particular motivational approach, would it improve their performance.

Relatedly, as motivational theory suggests, certain motivational styles should be conducive to either better performance or greater longevity of performance. Thus, understanding if it is indeed possible to change someone's motivational style from one deemed less successful i.e., more externally focused, to one that is more intrinsically driven. Is it possible to change someone's motivational style to create an improved performance across a race i.e., short term/immediate and b0 across seasons of training and racing i.e., long term.

The present study noted some interesting potential differences in the way male and female athletes consider their family role responsibilities in relation to their time spent engaging in the sport of triathlon, and this could also warrant further investigation to better understand how gender roles might impact motivations for sport engagement.

Limitations

There are several limitations that may impact the reliability of the findings of the present study. First, in the recruitment process for this study, participants were identified by posting recruitment announcements in popular triathlete social media groups. As a result, participants were drawn from a community that was already invested enough in the sport of triathlon to belong to these groups, potentially eliminating access to more casual, or less connected individuals. This may be responsible for there being a smaller than expected distinction in motivational profiles between 'competitive' and 'just participant' athletes, as even the 'just participating' athletes, are seemingly more than just casually invested in the sport. Secondly, regarding the initial participant recruitment, while a statistically useful number of male and female identified participants were recruited, the researchers had hoped to expand the data collection to build an understanding of the motivational profiles of athletes identifying as trans gender or non-binary but were unsuccessful in recruiting a large enough sample to be create a comparable group.

In the second stage of the present study, a small sample of interviews were completed to help illuminate the quantitative data results drawn from the online survey. These interviews were conducted using a fixed series of questions and did not allow for follow up probing of interviewees, which could have further the understanding generated by these interviews.

Finally, as with all research pursued during the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hard to identify or ensure that the context within which participants were living at the time of responding to the research questions, did not influence the outcomes. As a result, the findings may differ to those if the study were to be repeated in a different period, with less global crisis.

Conclusion

The study suggests that a far greater variety of motivational profiles are already present amongst the triathlon community than may have been previously assumed. This recognition could assist the sport in its continued growth by making greater effort to serve athletes with diverse motivations for participation. Furthermore, the identification of a motivational profile that correlates with greater success in competitive triathlon lays the groundwork for research-informed training programs that could potentially aid athletes in performance improvements by intentionally shifting their mindset to better reflect the 'winning' motivational profile.

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Appendix A - Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale

(BPNSNF)

Below, we ask you about the kind of experiences you have in your life. Please read each of the following items carefully. You can choose from 1 to 5 to indicate the degree to which the statement is true for you at this point in your life.

1. I feel a sense of choice and freedom in the things I undertake. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Most of the things I do feel like "I have to". 1 2 3 4 5
3. I feel that the people I care about also care about me. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I feel excluded from the group I want to belong to. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I feel confident that I can do things well. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I have serious doubts about whether I can do things well. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I feel that my decisions reflect what I really want. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I feel forced to do many things I wouldn't choose to do. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I feel connected with people who care for me, and for whom I care. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I feel that people who are important to me are cold and distant towards me. 1 2 3 4
- 5
11. I feel capable at what I do. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I feel disappointed with many of my performances. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I feel my choices express who I really am. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I feel pressured to do too many things. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I feel close and connected with other people who are important to me. 1 2 3 4 5
16. I have the impression that people I spend time with dislike me. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I feel competent to achieve my goals. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I feel insecure about my abilities. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I feel I have been doing what really interests me. 1 2 3 4 5
20. My daily activities feel like a chain of obligations. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I experience a warm feeling with the people I spend time with. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I feel the relationships I have are just superficial. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I feel I can successfully complete difficult tasks. 1 2 3 4 5
24. I feel like a failure because of the mistakes I make. 1 2 3 4 5

Scoring information:

Autonomy satisfaction: items 1, 7, 13, 19

Autonomy frustration: items 2, 8, 14, 20

Relatedness satisfaction: items 3, 9, 15, 21

Relatedness frustration: items 4, 10, 16, 22

Competence satisfaction: items 5, 11, 17, 23

Competence frustration: items 6, 12, 18, 24

Appendix B -Exercise Regulations Questionnaire (BREQ-3)

Age: _____ years

Sex: male female (please circle)

WHY DO YOU ENGAGE IN EXERCISE?

We are interested in the reasons underlying peoples' decisions to engage or not engage in physical exercise. Using the scale below, please indicate to what extent each of the following items is true for you. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers and no trick questions. We simply want to know how you personally feel about exercise. Your responses will be held in confidence and only used for our research purposes.

	Not true for me		Sometimes true for me		Very true for me
1	0	1	2	3	4
It's important to me to exercise regularly					
2	0	1	2	3	4
I don't see why I should have to exercise					
3	0	1	2	3	4
I exercise because it's fun					
4	0	1	2	3	4
I feel guilty when I don't exercise					
5	0	1	2	3	4
I exercise because it is consistent with my life goals					
6	0	1	2	3	4
I exercise because other people say I should					
7	0	1	2	3	4
I value the benefits of exercise					
8	0	1	2	3	4
I can't see why I should bother exercising					
9	0	1	2	3	4
I enjoy my exercise sessions					
10	0	1	2	3	4
I feel ashamed when I miss an exercise session					
11	0	1	2	3	4
I consider exercise part of my identity					
12	0	1	2	3	4
I take part in exercise because my friends/family/partner say I should					
13	0	1	2	3	4
I think it is important to make the effort to exercise regularly					

14	I don't see the point in exercising	0	1	2	3	4
15	I find exercise a pleasurable activity	0	1	2	3	4
16	I feel like a failure when I haven't exercised in a while	0	1	2	3	4
17	I consider exercise a fundamental part of who I am	0	1	2	3	4
18	I exercise because others will not be pleased with me if I don't	0	1	2	3	4
19	I get restless if I don't exercise regularly	0	1	2	3	4
20	I think exercising is a waste of time	0	1	2	3	4
21	I get pleasure and satisfaction from participating in exercise	0	1	2	3	4
22	I would feel bad about myself if I was not making time to exercise	0	1	2	3	4
23	I consider exercise consistent with my values	0	1	2	3	4
24	I feel under pressure from my friends/family to exercise	0	1	2	3	4

Appendix C - The Sport Motivation Scale (SMS-28)

WHY DO YOU PRACTICE YOUR SPORT?

Using the scale below, please indicate to what extent each of the following items corresponds to one of the reasons for which you are presently practicing your sport.

	Does not correspond	Corresponds	Corresponds	Corresponds
Corresponds	at all	a little	moderately	a lot
<u>exactly</u>	1	2	3	4
7	5	6	7	8

WHY DO YOU PRACTICE YOUR SPORT ?

1. For the pleasure I feel in living exciting experiences. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
2. For the pleasure it gives me to know more about the sport that I practice. 1 2
3 4 5 6 7
3. I used to have good reasons for doing sport, but now I am asking myself if I should continue doing it. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
4. For the pleasure of discovering new training techniques. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
5. I don't know anymore; I have the impression of being incapable of succeeding in this sport. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
6. Because it allows me to be well regarded by people that I know. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
7. Because, in my opinion, it is one of the best ways to meet people. 1 2 3
4 5 6 7

8. Because I feel a lot of personal satisfaction while mastering certain techniques. difficult training
1 2 3 4
5 6 7
9. Because it is absolutely necessary to do sports if one wants to be in shape. 1 2
3 4 5 6 7
10. For the prestige of being an athlete. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
11. Because it is one of the best ways I have chosen to develop other aspects of myself. 1
2 3 4 5 6 7
12. For the pleasure I feel while improving some of my weak points. 1 2 3
4 5 6 7
13. For the excitement I feel when I am really involved in the activity. 1 2 3
4 5 6 7
14. Because I must do sports to feel good about myself. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
15. For the satisfaction I experience while I am perfecting my abilities. 1 2 3
4 5 6 7
16. Because people around me think it is important to be in shape. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
17. Because it is a good way to learn lots of things which could be useful to me in other areas of my life. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
18. For the intense emotions I feel doing a sport that I like. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
19. It is not clear to me anymore; I don't really think my place is in sport. 1 2 3
4 5 6 7
20. For the pleasure that I feel while executing certain difficult movements. 1 2
3 4 5 6 7
21. Because I would feel bad if I was not taking time to do it. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
22. To show others how good I am good at my sport. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7

23. For the pleasure that I feel while learning training techniques that I have never tried before. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
24. Because it is one of the best ways to maintain good relationships with my friends. 1
2 3 4 5 6 7
25. Because I like the feeling of being totally immersed in the activity. 1 2 3
4 5 6 7
26. Because I must do sports regularly. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
27. For the pleasure of discovering new performance strategies. 1 2 3 4
5 6 7
28. I often ask myself; I can't seem to achieve the goals that I set for myself. 1 2
3 4 5 6 7

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Kim M. Tuson and Marc R. Blais, 1995*

KEY FOR SMS-28

2, 4, 23, 27 Intrinsic motivation - to know

8, 12, 15, 20 Intrinsic motivation - to accomplish

1, 13, 18, 25 Intrinsic motivation - to experience stimulation

7, 11, 17, 24 Extrinsic motivation - identified

9, 14, 21, 26 Extrinsic motivation - introjected

6, 10, 16, 22 Extrinsic motivation - external regulation

3, 5, 19, 28 Amotivation

Appendix D: Interview Transcripts

Study Participants

Participant 1	Female	Short	Participant
Participant 2	Female	Long	Competitive
Participant 3	Female	Short	Competitive
Participant 4	Female	Long	Participant
Participant 5	Male	Long	Competitive
Participant 6	Female	Long	Participant
Participant 7	Male	Short	Participant
Participant 8	Male	Short	Competitive

Interview One

Interviewer: What initially motivated you to begin triathlon and does it differ from what motivates you to continue now?

Participant 1: Um, so let's see my motivation to begin was bizarre and I still don't actually know what it is to be honest. So I graduated, well, I was going to graduate law school and I got this really weird idea. Too. This was obviously post like recovering from my surgery. Um, and so I got this bizarre idea to sign up for a 5k trail run.

And for me that was like a really big deal. I've never raced or anything before that. And I did it in places like third or fourth or something. And my, I got in the car and I was like, well, that was kind of easy. I'm going to do a triathlon. And my mom was like, I've never, first of all, I thought this was like a one and done thing, and I've never heard you talk about triathlon.

Like, do you even know what that is? And I was like, no, I have no idea, but it sounds good. Um, so it was kind of just like a thing that I thought I wanted to do for a challenge, essentially. Um, yeah. Um, so that's kinda how I ended up wanting to do it. And then it took a couple of years. I think it took me two or three years to do my first sprint, because I had to learn how to swim properly.

Um, cause I never did that before and I'm like a really terrible slow runner. Um, It's not pretty. Um, and then again, like, I know how to ride a bike, but I didn't know how to ride a bike. So it was really like starting at zero. Um, and I did my first race and doggy paddled the whole swim because I panicked.

I had panic attacks at work and I'd sit in the parking lot and cry before I went up the elevator. Um, And now I think it's the same. It's just changing what the challenge is. Uh, like my half iron man was like one of the hardest things I've ever done.

Like just getting to that point. Like I literally crossed the finish line and started sobbing because I was like, this is like, I never thought that I could do any of these things. So I think it's just like, sort of proving to myself that I'm still alive and capable after suffering for 23 years. Yeah. So I think, I think that's, it was that even, I don't even know if that's like a real answer though.

Cause it's not like a concrete, it's totally not to like the concrete

Interviewer: Um, in your opinion, not what makes a successful triathlon.

Participant 1: Trying. I mean, this is one of the things that I struggle with. Like I keep saying I'm not, not really into I'm one of those people, that's like, I'm not really a triathlete I'm slow and this and that. And it's like, I just did half iron man. I showed up. Like I do races. I have an entire rack full of metal.

Like why can I not just say that I'm a triathlete I'm so like, in my mind, It's someone that's fast and does triathlons and wins. But in reality, I know it's anyone who does three sports. I'm mediocre at three sports. Um, so it's just like doing it, like being active and doing a swim bike run, I guess, by definition.

Interviewer: How do you feel you sit into the triathlon community or the typical triathlete profile if you feel like you do?

Participant 1: Um, that's a really good question. I guess I fit in because I do three sports. Um, and I feel like I've been able to fit in because my experience with the community has been incredibly supportive and it's a sport that I felt like I could break into no matter what the distance or speed was, because really it's about doing.

Um, and the thing that I find most attractive as a community is that like every, most people get into it because they're trying to overcome something and that's essentially why I'm doing it. Um, so it's like somewhere that I feel like I fit in no matter what. And look, there's obviously people who are different from my experiences or have had different experiences, but I feel like it doesn't matter what you look like, how fast you are, or what you can do.

I've been really lucky to find friends who I can have fun with, like while still being active and supported. And that speaks to me, speaks volumes of the community and fitting in.

Interviewer: Um, tell me about your emotions you experience when you train and emotions you experience when you race.

Participant 1: Uh, when I train.

There's probably like more frustration than I'd like to admit, uh, because I want to do well, but I mean, every day is different and some days you feel like crap, some days you're slow, some days you're hungry, some days you bonk, like despite all your best efforts, some days I, you miss sessions. Um, and like that.

A hard pill to swallow sometimes, especially when you feel like you're supposed to be getting it right every day. Um, and racing. I seem to always just forget all of that and just like, go have fun. Um, shorter races. I try to do a little better, but like longer races. I'm like, just have fun. The clock doesn't matter.

It's just about how I feel. And one thing that's been really helpful to me is I try to say, thank you. And like smile and wave to every volunteer and officer or, you know, uh, service person that's out there helping make the race happen. And if I see people struggling, I'll try to talk to them and like, I know I'm struggling, but if I talk to people about their struggle and motivate them, then it motivates me.

And I kind of forget about the crap.

Interviewer: Um, do you actively think about your motivation level during a training cycle?

Participant 1: Like how motivated? I feel, um, Yeah, I think so, because I, I mean, I do have a lot of burnout feelings, so, um, my motivation, I know it varies. And there were some days where I just didn't care. Um, so it's deciding if I don't care and I'm actively lazy or productively lazy, or, um, do I not care and I'm going to be frustrated about it.

So you like respond accordingly, like check in with your motivation level and see what you're going to do about that information, especially cause I know I'm so prone to injury. So I have to be very careful where if I don't feel motivated, is it fatigue related or am I in pain? And if I do push through, is it going to put me in a better place or a worse place?

Like sometimes I don't like running. So sometimes I'll be super unmotivated to go running, but then I'll just go walk and start running. And then I'm like, oh my God, I'm so glad I did this. But then sometimes I'll try and do it and feel awful for five minutes and just. So I think I, personally try and check in just so that I don't end up more injured or in a worse place.

Interviewer: Um, is there any kind of physical sensation you experience that helps motivate you?

Participant 1: Um, I understand the question, but I don't, I guess. Not like if I have days where I'm not in pain, that is pretty motivating to like finally just have a good workout and keep going and pushing beyond what I thought I was going to be able to do going into it.

Interviewer: Do you tune into your physical sensation when you train and race or tune out?

Participant 1: I think I have had to learn to tune in because I have so many issues that, um, and I, I don't ever want to do a race where I'm going to be in a worst position coming out of it because the point is to keep doing stuff after, um, and like not end up in the hospital after.

So. Tuning in, in the sense of saying like, I need to run or walk now and be totally okay with that. Um, and even like in training yeah. Just like tuning in and being like, I don't feel good. I'm uncomfortable. I'm unhappy. I need to go eat more, uh, rather than just shutting it down. I mean, sometimes things you'd have to shut down or be like this hurts, but if I keep going for another 30 seconds, it's going to go away.

Cause it's just a weird random pain. Um, but I guess that's still tuning in. So I guess I tuned in

Interview Two

Interviewer: So the first one then is what initially motivated you to start triathlons. And is it the same thing that motivates you now as a triathlete?

Participant 2: So, you know, I was thinking about this, I think. In my about five years, uh, doing triathlon that motivation has really kind of changed. Um, I think initially, uh, I was first introduced to triathlon, um, Kind of like an accident, it was a, it was a series of things that happened. Um, the first thing that happened was I was running a half marathon at the finish line.

This random woman was just like, you know, like, oh, good job. Oh, do you do triathlons? And I was like, what's that? Um, and so that kind of, you know, got the ball rolling. And then at work, um, We are participating in a triathlon relay. And so, you know, somebody does like the swim bike and run, and I was, um, always a run.

Um, but calm race day, the race kept being delayed due to poor weather. Um, so the bike was canceled and the swim, um, well, my swimmer. Basically got drunk. And so he was like, I can't, I can't swim safely. Um, do you want to swim? And I was like, oh, I don't have a swimsuit, but I borrowed my swimsuit from a random person.

Um, and I managed to just like breaststroke most of it. Um, and then I ran and so that was kind of like my soft launch into track. Um, and I think at that point it was more like, oh, this is fine. You know, this is different from all that running I've been doing, just pounding the pavement. Um, and so, um, I was also encouraged and motivated by the fact that I, uh, I was part of like a triathlon team or club.

And so it was. In many ways, easy to kind of, you know, segue into a sprint. And then an Olympic distance. I had a coach, I had teammates who were, uh, you know, there to support me, my journey into triathlon. And it was kind of like an accelerated journey because for some reason I did like a sprint Olympic distance and, um, Uh, so 3.3 women like the span of eight months of buying a bike.

But, um, yeah, it was, I think it, it got me, you know, they say like, once you try it, you're hooked. And that was certainly the case for me. I tried it all, tried all the flavors and I was like, I like it. Sign me off.

Interviewer: Um, what, in your opinion, makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 2: Oh, gosh. Wow. That's a deep question. Um, I think just like the desire, the determination to, oh, I'm going to make such a bad plan, um, to try and to just. It for me, like triathlon is, is, is more of a lifestyle, um, rather than like, just like a hobby and I, and that sounds very like, uh, I don't know the power of now or whatever. Um, I, um, it's, uh, I was, I was saying earlier that I think my motivation for triathlon has, has changed. Um, what I mean by that is also, I didn't, I guess I didn't finish, um, is that after, um, the whole, like, you know, the newness and kind of the, wanting to try out, wanting to do a new thing, um, Appeal, you know, does it hold for five years?

Um, and so I think min way, um, I was also kind of going through a time of my life, where I was just drinking a lot. Um, part of it was because that was my work, uh, back then as a broker, um, it just meant having to, uh, entertain your clients going on, on, you know, big dinners and big meals. And. Um, and that was just part and parcel of my job and it was making me very unhappy.

Um, but I always had this thing called triathlon to kind of lean on and be like, oh, you know what? Like, I, I can't do that tonight. I can't say out for too long because I have. Uh, this crazy ride tomorrow or in the morning. Um, and so in a way it was also a little bit of a pressure or an excuse, um, and a good one that people are like, oh, okay.

It was always the same, the test being like a heart condition or a medical reason. Um, and so it was partly that, but then I was like, oh, well I said I have to ride, so I should probably go ride. Um, and it became. Uh, yeah, it was that kind of motivation to sort of eventually take myself out of, uh, bad situations or situations that I no longer wanted to be a part of.

Um, and eventually. I realize I actually enjoy it. Um, enjoy sports or triathlon and, uh, I wound up quitting my job. Um, and I was just so tired of the drinking and partying. Um, you know, in my mid, mid twenties, maybe the late twenties, it was like, it was a lot of fun. Um, you get a little older and you're just like, whoo.

My body cannot keep up. Uh, but, um, so those days are long past now. And, um, I think, you know, now my motivation is just to kind of be healthy. Um, and also it kind of just helps to keep me in check. Um, to keep the sort of, uh, on a schedule on a routine. And I, and I'm a very like routines kind of person.

So I like having that habit, um, uh, or that lifestyle, I guess. Um, it gives, it feels like it gives me a sense of purpose. Um, And I, I've tried to kind of also stray from leaning too much on this one thing triathlon too, to give me purpose in life because I know there is more to life. Um, and so I think a successful triathlete in that sense, you know, um, has, uh, has a lot of, uh, Interest to, uh, besides triathlon, they are willing to try new things as well.

Uh, keep an open kind of mind to, uh, different pursuits. And so, uh, trying to be successful in triathlon doesn't necessarily mean that's the only thing you're successful in. Um, but, uh, Yeah, just having that grit and determination to at least try because not every triathlete is going to be on the podium or is going to be, you know, in national championships or world championships.

Um, but that doesn't make them a poor triathlete. Um, And so I think it's important that we, you know, kind of like adjust your not standards or expectations so that you, you know, understand success comes in different forms in different benchmarks.

Interviewer: How do you feel that you fit into the triathlon community as a whole?

Participant 2: Oh, you're coming out with bears. Oh, that's, that's a tough one. So I think, um, I think there's kind of two, two things that go, um, against me, if you will, as a triathlete, which is one being a woman. And then being an Asian woman, um, I feel that, uh, it can, sometimes it feels like I don't want to say the odds are stacked against you, but I felt, um, even in Singapore when I did have a team, um, and I was being first being introduced to triathlon, the team was overwhelmingly.

Men in their forties. Um, and at that time being like in my, um, in my twenties, uh, we just had literally nothing in common maybe except for like drinking. Um, and so that was a, you didn't really feel like you had a place in that. Um, so I felt like I kind of had to put my head down and do my own research.

I have. You know, I had a coach, but he was also a white male. Um, and so there was kind of a limit, uh, too, sometimes I felt like I was asking too many questions or, um, you know, not

asking the right questions. Um, and so it wasn't that I was intimidated or fearful. It was more like, I felt like I was being a burden.

Um, and so, you know, and that's when you go online and you're, you know, doing all the Google searches, but there's so much information out there, you know, and you're like, I just want to talk to a human, um, and see what has worked for that person or what they might say, what they let this one person, you know, it's that, that having too many options because so overwhelming.

Um, and so I felt like I really kind of lacked. People to relate to or people that were relatable. Um, and I saw, also had like, you know, female teammates, but, um, at the same time, there are also like white women. Um, and so I, not like white women and Asian women don't have anything in common. Um, but some, some issues like even just sizing of clothing, You know, I'm, I'm by feet tall, like 98 pounds.

And you know, these ladies are like five, 10, like, you know, goddesses. And I'm just like, yeah, we, you can buy anything, but I'm decided like a child, what should I do? Where should I buy things? Um, and so coming back here to Japan, um, You know, all of a sudden, I wasn't good company. I was with a lot of Asian women, Japanese, female triathletes.

Now the only thing now is that I communicate better in English rather than Japanese. And so it was kind of that language barrier. Um, and again, kind of that culture. Um, now there was also a bit of a culture barrier, um, because I grew up abroad. And all of a sudden I'm, you know, I felt like I was maybe missing like the, I was not like needing the air or now I'm like, is she like, is she annoyed with me?

Or maybe, maybe I should stop asking so many questions. Um, so again, um, you know, and maybe that's just my nature too, you know, feeling like I'm. Uh, a little bit of a burden, um, which is probably something I should get over. Um, yeah. So, um, where do I fit in? I don't know if I really found a place to fit in yet.

Um, but I, I feel that because I've had the experiences that I have had, um, This is actually what motivates me and what has motivated me to become a, uh, um, pursue becoming a triathlon coach and a coach women specifically, um, and beginners, especially. So that's kind of, um, how I snowballed my experiences into something that will hopefully, um, you know, do good for others.

Interviewer: Um, tell me about the emotions that come up for you through like, uh, a training cycle through the training and then the ultimate race. If you're racing.

Participant 2: Oh, I, I enjoy training. Um, it is, it is probably my biggest enjoyment, um, because I actually get really anxious and, and kind of nervous if you will, at races.

Um, no matter how small they were, it is really, um, it's something that I feel that I've been working on. Um, you know, just trying to. Uh, B war people are cool, but I do tend to get really like worked up. Uh, again, it doesn't matter whether it's, you know, important or not. Um, it's just something by major.

I, I just get like so nervous, even in high school for track beats, I was like throwing up on the sidelines and she's like,

um, so for me, the training is. Really why it motivates me. I think I enjoy setting up smaller goals. I know, I know for a lot of people, the race is kind of like almost like the end all be all

that is like the ultimate goal. You know, I have, I have checked all the boxes and I am here and I have arrived.

Um, but for me it's like, oh shit, I'm here now. Um, so I think, um, We're training. Uh, I'm all about kind of, uh, utilizing, you know, the tools we have, like training peaks to set up little, little goals, little benchmarks, uh, whether it's like, you know, try to get so many hours or so many, uh, so many swims in this week, or, um, try to hit this FTP.

Um, Or, you know, those kinds of things like time or power base goals or whatever other smaller goals that do not necessarily accumulate into this one race. Uh, which I think was actually in hindsight, served me or has served me well, um, during like COVID when we had no racism at all. And I was just like, I'm fine.

Um, But, um, yeah, I think it's, uh, that's just kind of how I functioned. The training is what I is, is really 95% of what I kind of look forward to. Not that I go into every training, like, you know, you've been EA like, I'm so excited to be here. No, but I generally do, um, enjoy the training more than the racing.

That's not to say that after the race, I don't feel awesome. Like I'm like, heck yeah, I did that.

Um, but even then I think I tend to actually be very critical of my race performance, even though there's probably no need to, but you know, when you have all this bad allies everyday and you're yeah.

I'm so, uh, the training is what, um, generally motivates me.

Interviewer: do you kind of track your level of motivation throughout a season or a training cycle? Uh, and do you respond to it in some way?

Participant 2: Um, and I think that's a really important thing, um, because it's hard to be motivated.

All year around every single day. Um, like even, so I have yet to, I signed up for my first full ironman in October, 2019. Okay. And it was scheduled for June 20, 20. Well, you know, basically the world just blew up into smithereens. Um, and so at this point I have still yet to do it. Um, and it has, my entry has been deferred to 2023.

So next year, so this, um, you know, I couldn't, I absolutely could not rely on motivation, um, to. Power me through an Ironman right now, it's, I've trained for an Ironman and basically about three cycles now. Um, and at one point, you know, at a certain point pretty early on, I, I knew, I realized that this event is not going to happen.

So I, I, you know, curtail that. Um, but I think, um, I think, you know, there are days when you have to really just kick your own ass and you're a dislike. They get this in, get this done. Um, you can do hard things. Um, but there are also days I just absolutely fail at that and I don't do anything at all, or I do something maybe a little easier.

Um, and I'm, I'm pretty generous. I feel that I'm pretty generous with myself and my athletes. Um, I just don't feel that, um, If we are not, if we are not motivated, I don't want that to, again, kind of snowball into something where every day, because every training session becomes something you are absolutely not motivated for.

And all of a sudden you just hate everything, um, or you know, about triathlon and training. Um, and so I think, you know, sometimes when we don't have that motivation, it's okay to take a step back. Um, and so this Ironman Philippines thing, it actually did happen on March 6th, but it was mainly for like, you know, local nationals.

Um, and it would have been events and depth hole for me to go. So they accepted a deferral.

Um, but I think I, I, I realized kind of like in February or early February, that this was not going to happen for me. Um, and so I kind of, you know, put the kibosh on my training. And pretty much ever since I had actually been kind of very motivated if you will.

Um, but I've been enjoying it, just trying to catch up with life. Um, and I feel like this was probably my biggest off season that I've had. Um, partly, yeah, maybe I'm not feeling so motivated. Um, but I feel pretty strongly that I will become motivated again. Um, maybe I need a race, um, but maybe I've become that person.

Um, but I also know that kind of deep down, I need to kind of just sit down and think about what, um, goals I have. Um, You know, whether it's trying to reach a new ACTP or trying to run that, that set of 25 K or whatever. Um, uh, and that's just not something I've taken the time to do. I feel like, you know, a lot of times we're crazy and, uh, you know, I need to.

I am sit this dog and do this and that and get my booster shot. And now I'm, you know, out of a fever. So I feel like once things have settled, my partner is also in the Navy. He's about getting ready to deploy. So I'm just by myself. I can just focus on myself.

Yeah. So things like that, you know, maybe they're excuses. Um, but I feel like, um, we will all find, or we find that purpose or that motivation. Um, but sometimes life is what it is. And so there's no point like wearing ourselves down and stretching ourselves then if, um, if. That thing like triathlon, isn't going to give you joy or it's not, it's just going to stress you out even more.

Um, and so, yeah, I would say kind of be kind to yourself, you know, try, um, you can try to do a yoga session or some hip mobility or something. Um, but it doesn't mean you have to be

on a bike, you know, every other day, like smashing out an intense session. Um, you will find that motivation again. Um, but it might not be today and it might not be tomorrow.

That's okay.

Right. If I feel like, okay, my, my hamstrings feel a little off, um, then, you know, I'm kinda like, I don't know. Let's, let's kind of. Hold us back a bit. Um, but, uh, yeah, if it's, if it's just really hard and I'm just like, oh, I am, I am dying. Um, then it's like, yeah, you can do more things. And if you started this, you can finish it.

Um, and then, and then I think the next step would be like, okay, um, you're really struggling girl. After this, let's go, you know, Uh, pine the ice cream or whatever it is at that I might be kind of, you know, being for, um, I dunno, six piece chicken McNugget.

Interviewer: Do you want to tune into physical sensation or tune out from it.

Participant 2: Oh gosh. I think I tune in to how I am, how I feel. Um, and I tuned out everything else.

Um, everything else is kind of a blur. I'm just really focused on it. You know, making sure that my form isn't, uh, gone to crap and, you know, I'm trying to stay loose or relaxed, um, and, and pretty much everything, uh, whether it's swimming, cycling, or running. Um, and just trying to focus on something kind of particular about what I'm doing, you know, am I.

Keeping my shoulders loose when I'm running, not like, um, am I, uh, you know, am I keeping my core from when I, when I'm cycling, I'm sort of like wiggling all over the place. Um, things like that.

So I think it's easier for me to just focus on one aspect, uh, that I can control. Um, And, and try to just, you know, lock in on something like that. Um, and, or, or, you know, am I, how am I breathing? Okay. You're breathing like, you know, a dog of rabies. Okay. Not that I know. Um, but you know, if you're reading like a crazy person, uh, can you, you know, bring that in a bit, um, and.

Slow deep, purposeful breath. Okay. Now, all right, moving on to the next thing, the shoulders, um, that kind of, um, you know, it's a lot faster than that in my head. Um, but I think I just tried to focus on me when the going gets real tough.

Um, and that literally might be all I do lately, but it's something that I feel is important, um, because I do kind of pick back up the intensity and the volume, uh, training. Um, I hope that it will, you know, serve me, um, in the long term and not have, you know, This junky shoulder. Um, so I think, uh, with triathlon motivation, a lot of it is just so longterm, um, rather than kind of like the short-term games.

So, um, yeah, just having this, having to work towards longer term goals is also, um, is also something that I'm, I'm very much kind of a. Delayed gratification type of person. Um, so I think that also factors into what motivates me with triathlon, but yeah, that's pretty much it.

Interview Three

Interviewer: What initially motivated you to begin triathlon – and does that differ from what motivates your continued engagement in the sport?

Participant 3: I've loved biking for 15+ years and an accomplished athlete friend suggested I do a very short tri with her for fun. Although the distances were really short, gaining confidence in swimming and running as well as the complexity of all the parts was really daunting. I felt prepared when I arrived at the start, but with limited experience swimming in groups and getting kicked / swallowing water early on, my swim was really poor. Despite being 2nd out of the water, my dear friend waited for me to doggie paddle my way to the swim finish and stayed with me for the bike and run. I was absolutely exhilarated when I finished the race. (My FB post the next day read like an over-long Oscars speech, thanking anyone and everyone. All for a race that totaled about 8 miles). But I really wanted to redeem my swim. I did another short tri with my daughter (who's a great swimmer) and the swim went much better. Then I did a tri with my husband and sister and started to get the hang of it.

Serendipitously, my husband started working in San Diego and we started splitting our time between northern and southern California. I stumbled on a couple of open water swim groups, found a few like-minded women (older, with kids at home, who liked to swim and bike but were slower paced) and it turned into my community away from home.

So I would say my initial motivation was to challenge myself to do things I wasn't really sure I could do, particularly open water swimming and running. My ongoing motivation was related to loving the biking and swimming community around San Diego and finding healthy social connections during the pandemic. Now that I'm back in northern California (and really

missing my active SoCal tribe), my motivation is staying fit and the community and encouragement I get from my tri club and my coach.

In particular after two years of not working full time, training keeps me active, motivated and feeling like I'm making forward progress.

Interviewer: In your opinion, what makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 3: discipline/self-motivation: the ability to get past the distractions and voices saying you don't want to do something and just get it done. There is a special discipline in doing the less fun foundational work - strength, stretching, muscle activation before a workout - to get the most out of the more "fun" stuff. I think there's an element of risk-taking: tri is a pretty unique among a few sports in that the amateurs can race alongside the pros. triathletes have to be willing to take (calculated) risks - of injury, of failing (in a public way), of putting themselves into a place where they challenge themselves and succeed or fail so publicly.

I believe it takes courage: beyond risk taking, there are many elements of a tri that can spark fear/worry/self-doubt, from swimming in open water to managing hills and transitions even to toileting needs during the race and to...perhaps most importantly the annoying voices in your head. Overcoming all of that and moving forward takes cojones.

Interviewer: How do you feel that you fit in the triathlete community or the stereotypical triathlete profile?

Participant 3: I came to tri later in life (late 40's / early 50's) and I'm still trying to get comfortable with believing that I am an athlete, of any kind. I have avoided reaching out to

some teams or individuals who might be good training partners or groups because I fear being too slow to keep up. In the tri community, I'm an age-grouper who is mostly seeking to challenge myself, get fitter, have fun and finish, so I feel a bit out of the stereotypical crowd who I think of as younger, more dedicated or life-long athletes with specific time or placement goals.

Interviewer: What emotions do you experience when you a) train and b) race?

Participant 3: Train: My emotions during training range from peace and tranquility (for example when I'm in the zone on a swim or run) to anxious nervousness when I feel like I'm not at my optimal pace or form, to frustration and negative self-talk when I'm feeling off. During a race, I almost always go through what feels a bit akin to the stages of grief - from moments (typically early in a race) when I ask myself what I'm doing, who I think I am, and swear to myself that I'm never doing another race, to moments (typically after finishing a leg or getting close to the end) of pure elation, joy and pride. During my last big race, I had several moments of doubt, especially at the beginning of the swim and of the run and yet every picture of me on the course, I had a huge smile on my face. Despite the doubts, I kept reminding myself that I'd worked hard and I could do this. That kept me moving forward. Despite the physical discomfort and pain and the self doubt that creeps in, there is a lot of joy during a race.

Interviewer: Do you actively think about your motivation level during a training cycle?

Participant 3: I absolutely think about my motivation level while training. While I'm preparing for any training session - dressing, reviewing my workout, planning, collecting gear/nutrition/water, I'm constantly gauging my motivation level, my willingness to push,

etc. There is almost always an active (often far too active) conversation in my head about whether I'm doing things "right" and with the right level of intensity and engagement.

Interviewer: Do you tune in to your physical sensations when you train and race or do you tune them out?

Participant 3: This is such a great question. I have a tendency to spend a lot of time in judgement and rumination so tuning into how I'm feeling feels a little scary. When I'm feeling good - especially on a beautiful day during an open water swim - I enjoy tuning into the relaxation and the zen. When I'm in rough shape - as was true when I felt really off during a swim earlier this week - all I want to do is block the sensations and get to the end. When I'm at my best - for example, a couple miles before I finished my first 70.3 - I'm tuned into how I felt and really wanting to relax into it and enjoy it.

Interview Four

Interviewer: All right, so first question is when you started triathlon, what was your motivation then and is it different to why you carry on now?

Participant 4: Yes, I had always been kind of interested in maybe doing a triathlon because I have a background from when I was younger of doing swimming and running distance and had taken up CrossFit and the owner of the CrossFit gym is a seasoned triathlete and so people tend to kind of follow along eventually, if you're there long enough and a couple of my closest friends are seasoned triathletes and so it came up as an idea of something to do and I had become a mother and was a stay at home mom and my whole identity of becoming a mom and so my husband was really supportive and suggested that I do a race just to have something for myself to do and then I enjoyed it so much that I've decided to continue doing it.

Interviewer: What in your opinion makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 4: For myself and for the people that I train with and that I know, you have to be really organized person, particularly if you're doing an Ironman distance and all of us have and they just sheer number of training hours that have to go into accomplishing a half distance or a full distance is pretty extreme, especially when you have other obligations like family and work, all of those things. So, I think that the organization and just kind of a drive to push yourself.

I got really skilled at kind of fitting into my workout schedule. So, I started training when my oldest daughter was in school. So, then I had the daytime hours to work on training and then I would ride the trainer at night when her dad would get home from work. So, I would prepare dinner and have that ready for him to be able to cook when he walked in the door and about a

half an hour before he'd get home, I would get on the trainer and start my ride. So, by the time I finished it dinner was done and just kind of fitting it in where you can.

Interviewer: how do you feel that you fit into the triathlon community or in comparison to the stereotypical triathlete profile?

Participant 4: I think my impression is that I am more of a stereotypical triathlete than kind of your elite and pro athletes because my experience with the race is that it's largely people that are just wanting to have a fitness goal for themselves and have something to work towards and have enjoyed kind of how welcoming the community can be because my experience has been that other people who race really like to share training hours or tips or join you or give you give you knowledge and talk about different things and support people at the races. We've gotten to spectate races and some of my friends have come with me to spectate and I think as you get into your middle age it's an awfully nice thing to have something that you can do successfully for a long time. Since it's not brute force, it's just how long can I hang in here and do this thing?

Interviewer: tell me about the emotions that you experience when you train and race, how would you describe the sort of emotions that come up for you?

Participant 4: Training days are so much different than race days, obviously, race days, you get the energy of kind of the adrenaline and the excitement of being out there with other contenders and with other people and having a crowd and having a closed course, goals and all of that is different than your training days and I know the long slog of training days since it takes so many months to prepare for a long distance and you have good days and bad days and I for my

first race, hired a coach to help keep me accountable and that was really helpful because when I'd have a bad day, I could text him or call him and just be like, oh, I'm out here on the bike and I've done 30 miles and I feel terrible and I just want to go home and it's like, but I have to ride the bike back because my car's 30 miles away. But toughing through those really hard days of training made the race day a lot of fun for me and I really enjoyed that. My race day, kind of emotions were just mostly excitement and then I tried to race from a place of gratitude and a couple of friends who have done quite a few races and they said since you're not going out there trying to podium, you're just trying to finish like having a good time and remember to thank the volunteers and we kind of cheer other people on and approach it the way that they know that I approach my general attitude towards working out is trying to encourage others and so that's how I approach my race day and so I just wind up having a lot of fun.

Interviewer: What gets you through on those days when you are 30 miles into the bike and hating every minute of it?

Participant 4: Well, for the first season of training, it was the thought about what I was taking away from my family and that I was not with them, that I was creating additional work for my husband and having to care for our child and not wanting to waste anybody's time and energy and effort that they were putting into supporting me, in my training, which was pretty significant for my community. Now, I have my coach who's a good friend of mine and then I had other families help watch out for my daughter on days that I would need to work out longer than school hours and just the amount of hours that I was asking my husband to put it on the weekend so I could do it, six hours on the bike and you know a three hour run and you know, do all the recovery and the napping and everything else that goes with it and so that was a lot of the motivating factor. Now, that it's different, I'm a couple seasons in, it's just about having

that personal goal for myself and I know how much my mental health benefits from having something that I'm working on that strictly for myself and no one else.

I signed up to do 70.3 in September and I just had my second child four months ago. So, it's a good motivator to get back into shape. I was on modified bed rest. I'm an older mom a geriatric pregnancy as they like to call them. Yeah, so I'm 42 and my pregnancy wasn't unhealthy, but I wasn't able to work out and so I was on a modified bed rest for most of it. So, a lot of my general fitness feels really off right now and I'm just getting back into my training as of about three weeks ago and just kind of trying to be patient, but it is really motivated knowing that September is coming and I was hoping to PR the course because I raced it before.

Interviewer: when you are going through sort of a training cycle or a season cycle do you actively think about your motivation level and how it changes or is that not part of the conscious thought for you?

Participant 4: It's never been a conscious thought for me. I know some people operate that way. But for myself, I've always just been a put my head down, do the work in front of me, which might be part of why it appeals to me that it doesn't have to be a specific goal right to do a triathlon, it can be just your own personal best. So, for me, it's always been just like doing the thing in front of me and I do get satisfaction from seeing how the times improve over the course of a season. It's really fun to look at your data and see because I think a lot of us are kind of data nerds and looking at what your average bike speed is and how well that's going and looking at how your run distances and like how are you feeling and I do a lot of checking in how does my body feel after a workout to kind of gauge what I need to be daring as I move forward through the season but I don't think too deeply about it.

Interviewer: when you train or race and perhaps it's different, are you someone who is trying to tune into the physical sensations or tune them out?

Participant 4: I am one of the people whose tuning into the physical sensation it is that I've often described it as a meditation for myself, I have a really busy brain and a good amount of anxiety and the only time that I'm not paying attention to the running laundry list of things that have to happen during the day is actually when I'm at physical exertion and so I like to really settle into that. When I first started training, I had a couple of CrossFit coaches that were asking what kind of music I listened to when I trained and I was like, well, I don't and they thought I was crazy and I said, well, you can't listen to music on race day. So, I don't want to have a crutch of having music. I want to sit in with what I'm feeling and be able to know that I can do it. To go out and race for 12 hours is a long day.

Interviewer: have you done every distance that you aspire to race?

Participant 4: Yes, I am a person who likes to set a really big goal instead of a more moderate goal and so when I approached my coach about writing a program for me, he asked what my a race was going to be and I said I'm going to do a full distance this year and he was like all right, great, he's like well, you need to pick your B-race which should be a half this so I did Santa Cruz is my B-race and I did Cozumel was my A-race.

Interviewer: is there anything you want to say about your travel and experience or anything else that I should be thinking about, you think when I talk to triathletes about their motivation?

Participant 4: I think the only thing that stands out for me for my personal motivation to continue doing it was beyond just the enjoyment of meeting those goals for myself, was seeing how much it impacted the rest of my family to have something that was entirely for myself and that was kind of a surprise benefit to it and so that's been good motivation to get back to it and I've already noticed because I took a few months off after the first couple months postpartum with this one was taking it kind of easy and I've already noticed now that I'm back training, again, just how much better my mood is and how much happier the rest of my family is as well, where we all have these moments, right, that we all go do something for ourselves independent.

Interview Five

Interviewer: What initially motivated you to begin triathlon and does that differ from what motivates your continued engagement in the sport currently?

Participant 5: Change of lifestyle – had fallen into some addictive behaviors and needed to get in shape. Started running and cycling and kept building on the distances. Now I love to set goals for myself and work toward them. Completed 3 IM and DNF in Arizona as raced 3 weeks post Covid. Could have finished and would have it was my first or only but decided I had nothing to prove and ended after the bike.

Interviewer: What makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 5: Goal oriented and mentally strong. Not just the most expensive gear. Success is subjective – being out there, doing it is success.

Interviewer: How do you feel that you fit in the triathlete community or the typical triathlete profile?

Participant 5: It's a very broad community and I love to see all the different kinds of people who race. Training wise I have a strong and competitive cycling community, a friendly and supportive running community, but less community associated with the swim.

Interviewer: Tell me about the emotions you experience when you train and race in triathlon

Participant 5: The whole range from athletic depression to joy. Race day is a full party and celebration of the training achievement.

Interviewer: Do you actively think about your motivation level during a training program?

Participant 5: Yes – I'm aware that my motivation will have stages as we go through a 6 month training plan towards a full distance. Starting high and ending high but typically falls in the middle when the distances increase in training.

Interviewer: Do you tune in to your physical sensation when you train and race or tune out?

Participant 5: Tune in. I keep an eye on my metrics but I tend to do a lot of my training based on feel and give more or less power depending on what my body is telling me I have.

Interview Six

Interviewer: What initially motivated you to begin triathlon – and does that differ from what motivates your continued engagement in the sport?

Participant 6: My husband participated in a single triathlon and watching him train and then going to the race as a spectator were my initial motivations. It sounds dumb but he watched a video about prepping for transitions and something about that really spoke to me and made me want to try it out myself! Then seeing all of the "normal" people racing opened my eyes to the fact that triathlon isn't just for super fit, elite athletes but for people of all ages, body types, and abilities. After watching that race I signed up for the following year as soon as registration opened.

My motivation for sticking with the sport is different. I've found a great community, it keeps me fit, builds my self confidence, brings structure to my life, and is just a lot of fun.

Interviewer: In your opinion, what makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 6: To me it comes down to making swim-bike-run a part of your lifestyle. Not necessarily racing all the time, but consistently building swimming, biking, and running into your routine.

Interviewer: How do you feel that you fit in the triathlete community or the stereotypical triathlete profile?

Participant 6: I have good days and bad days when it comes to feeling like I fit in. When my training is on point it's much easier to call myself a triathlete. When I lean too heavily into running (which is my favorite discipline), I feel like maybe triathlon isn't right for me. And over the years as I've grown more experienced and confidence I don't let my speed or body type affect my feelings as much, but there are still moments when I'm out on a group ride trying to keep up with some super speedy people that I wonder if I'm just kidding myself with the whole triathlon thing.

Interviewer: What emotions do you experience when you a) train and b) race?

Participant 6: All of them lol. Confidence, anxiety, self-doubt, happiness, pride, discouragement, burnout, excitement, fun (almost never boredom)

Activities in order of how positively they impact my emotions: Solo training > racing > group training

Interviewer: Do you actively think about your motivation level during a training cycle?

Participant 6: All the time. I try to look at my motivation level as separate from my level of self-discipline. So even on days when I'm not feeling it I try to lean on my discipline to get the work done.

Interviewer: Do you tune in to your physical sensations when you train and race or do you tune them out?

Participant 6: Only for running and swimming - for those sports I get a lot of enjoyment in being totally present and "in my body" during them. Cycling I'm just trying to go to my mental happy place (no surprise that's my weakest sport).

Interview Seven

Interviewer: what initially motivated you to start triathlon and is it different from what motivates you to continue it now?

Participant 7: So, I was a two sport athlete in college and so I've always been wired for competition and you know when you are done with athletics and there's not a professional path for you, if you will and you're someone who's wired for competition, you look for something to fill that void, right? And so, I went and watched one of my good friends do the Chicago Marathon and I was like, oh, that's pretty cool, that seems really hard. I'm gonna do that. So, the next year I did the Chicago Marathon and then I think I saw the Ironman Triathlon World Championships and I'm like, man, someday I'm going to do that. That's the hardest, in my opinion, one day sporting event on the planet. So, then you kind of start to unpack that you're like, wow, that's a lot to take on, how do I go from where I am today to getting there. So, you sign up for a local running club, you start doing some bike training, some swimming with a Masters groups and next thing, you know, you're like I'm a triathlete and so that was it, probably my initial motivation was to fill that competitive void and the beauty of triathlon, in my opinion is, you're really competing, it's yourself, like, I'm a Clydesdale athlete. So, I like the fact that there's a way for me to benchmark myself against other people approximately my size. But in general, I'm competing against my own goal that's different for every race and so what keeps me in it is that I think I can race casually and into my 60's 70's and 80's and it's, I think, the nature of triathlon. It's not just one sport, so you naturally get back cross training effect. So, now it's about longevity and cross training and not getting burnout. I don't think there's other than riding outdoors, there's probably not a high risk of injury if you're following, kind of a program. So, for those, I would say, now, it's about variety. It's still about competing, because I like to compete against myself but it's probably about variety and longevity at this point.

Interviewer: What in your opinion makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 7: I mean, I would say with anything that would fall into the endurance category, I think someone that either is wired to be mentally strong, or can develop that over time. I was a collegiate wrestler. As an example, wrestling is not only a physical sport, but it's very mentally demanding as well and so when I was training for Ironman, Florida and I have two artificial hips, so a lot of my friends and training partners, like, why are you doing that? I'm like, well, I think I'm fast enough that I could walk the marathon and still make the cut off and my biggest asset is I'm too stupid to quit, right? So, I think what makes triathletes successful is the mental strength to know that our bodies are amazing and if we're capable of mentally pushing it, it will respond and it will adapt. So, I think that's probably the one thing that is probably most indicative of someone who is a successful triathlete however they deem success.

Interviewer: How do you feel or do you feel that you fit into the triathlete community and rack up against the sort of stereotypical or prototypical triathlete profile?

Participant 7: I mentioned that earlier. That's one of the things I love about the triathlon community is, you know, I'm 235 pounds and if you just saw me walking around, you wouldn't be like, hey, but that guy does a lot of triathlons. I probably got 60 races under my belt in terms of the time I've been racing as a triathlete. I love the fact that there's in different pockets, there's vibrant kids triathlons, where they start them in the pool and it's, you graduate up into it, I love that it's not one body type, it's not one skin tone, it's not one, you know, socio-economic demographic because you can do it in a, you know, \$100 bike you bought at Walmart, right and a pair of shoes that you bought at Walmart and so I like the accessibility and I also really

like the efforts to ensure that there's, I would say, active outreach to underrepresented groups and trying to lower the perceived barrier or bar to participate. I just like that and I mentioned I did a marathon and I've also done a lot of adventure racing and other types of obstacle course racing like if there's a race, I probably got it right. I would say that the triathlon community, in my opinion, is the most inclusive and inviting of any, if you would say, runners obstacle course, if you would, slice those up as individual endurance communities. My opinion is the triathlon one is the most inclusive and inviting and I really like that.

Interviewer: Thank you, talk to me about any emotions you experience during a training cycle and then during a race itself?

Participant 7: I mean, it kind of depends on a race, the race, your A race, right? So in 2019, I did Ironman Florida and then after that, I was training for the Clydesdale national sprint title, so very different race to go for 12 or 13 hours versus how do I get an hour at my redline? So, I would say, the emotions in the training and in the race itself are probably based on the type of race, at least for me that I'm doing. I would say I thought when I had my hips replaced, I thought my dream of an Ironman was dead. So, to train for eight months, have my family, they're screaming, like, that was emotional for me, right? Like, I set this ridiculous goal for myself and it took me way longer I thought to achieve it. But there was a ton of release. I mean, I was crying on the course to be honest with you. You do a sprint triathlon there's no space to cry. It's just pain. I'm saying when you're trying to, in that context, I wasn't competing against myself, I was trying to get in the podium at the sprint Clydesdale nationals, I failed by the way, after two years of people in their lab during COVID, I took fourth in 2019 and then 21, I took six I moved out. But for me, I would say the type of training I'm doing, when you're doing longer training, you get more endorphin release and you kind of settle into a rhythm and in

some odd way, it's relaxing, when you're training for a short race and you're doing hill repeats, or sprint repeats those are just hard. Thankfully, I'm wired that I like hard. So, I don't know if that's the thought process you were looking for me it's very specific, based on the distance and Ironman and because it was a long term goal I set for myself was a very emotional race for me.

Interviewer: during a training cycle, do you think about or are conscious about your motivation level?

Participant 7: No, for the last couple of years, I've hired a coach and so for me, I don't lack motivation, when I was training for Ironman, I was at a client in Seattle and I had a two and a half hour run. So, I woke up at two Pacific and ended a two and a half hour run on the treadmill in the basement of the Westin in Seattle because I had to go see a client, that's just how I'm wired. So, for me, I'm blessed I never have a problem with motivation and adding that additional layer of the coaching where it was a prescriptive workout, you're doing this on this day, I use training peaks. So, I could log into training peaks and be like, okay, I'm traveling or I won't have access to a pool, let's move these things around and then I just know, it's what I have to execute. Even when I'm not training for a race, I work out six days a week. My least favorite day of the week is my rest day. That's just how I'm wired. So, I think I'm probably a couple standard deviations away from the norm relative to that. But that's one of the reasons that I've been racing for 20 years and I still enjoy it is because I don't dread the training session, I look forward to it. I've always been very self-motivated there. So, it doesn't matter if I'm training for a sprint, this year I don't have any triathlons. I'm doing two long bike races and I feel the same way. So, it's not just triathlon specific, it's any goal that I have, I have no problem finding motivation.

I mean, I started racing with that marathon in 2003 and every year, I've done multiple races per year, with the exception of the two years ahead, I had one hip replaced one year and one the next and so that was a physical limitation and then in 2020, I had a bad bike crash and broke my collarbone and my scapula. So, there was probably after that I had probably six months where I never did anything outdoors because I was just trying to control the environment. So, I think both of those hip replacements in the shoulder problems were all physical limitations other than that I've never really not been motivated to train or to find A-races to give me something to provide more specificity. I'm going to move my body and I'm going to work out but if I have A-races and B-races raised on the calendar, then I naturally create structure around that.

Interviewer: when you are training or racing for that matter, do you tune into physical sensation or do you tune it out?

Participant 7: I would say when I'm training, I try to tune into it as an indication of burnout or early indication of risk or injury. I think when I race I can just totally check out like, I made that comment and I made it, it was a kind of a joke to my friends like which of the three sports are you best at as you train for IronMan, I'm like, none of them. I'm just too stupid to quit, it would take a massive problem for me to tune in to something be like, okay, I need to stop, right? I'll turn into my heart rate and be like, okay, I'm at 170 beats a minute, I'm gonna burn, I'm gonna blow up here if I don't dial it back, I'll tune in at that level. But I'm like, oh, that IT band is tight or my hamstring is tight or I've got some chafing from my wetsuit or none of that matters, it's like I came here for an objective and I'm going to do it.

Interviewer: Anything else you would like to share about your triathlon experiences?

Participant 7: I really love the sport of triathlon and I'm proud to be part of a community that is inclusive and trying to find ways to engage underrepresented groups in the sport of triathlon and like I said, I hope I'm doing my triathlons until I'm not able to stand up and my all three of my daughters race, so I'm also very proud that they've grown up watching the race and because there's such a focus on kids and making it accessible with a pool swim, they've all done multiple races, which to see them do something that I love is even more rewarding

Interview Eight

Interviewer: what initially motivated you to start triathlon and is it different from what motivates you to continue it now?

Participant 8: My initial motivation can be split in two, first I went to Germany to watch my brother compete at Roth, what an amazing feeling. Incidentally, it was the 1st time I saw him and his family in 15 years. Second, I was looking for something to get me healthy, the timing of Roth and me having some spare cash motivated me to buy a bike and indoor trainer (Saudi gets too hot to train outside all the time)

Interviewer: What in your opinion makes a successful triathlete?

Participant 8: I believe dedication makes a good triathlete. Until I started training for my first Sprint I was not aware of the level of dedication needed.

Interviewer: How do you feel or do you feel that you fit into the triathlete community and rack up against the sort of stereotypical or prototypical triathlete profile?

Participant 8: I don't believe I am a traditional triathlete as I started very late in life with no background in any of the 3 disciplines. However, as I am training all 3, I feel this defines me as a triathlete.

Interviewer: Thank you, talk to me about any emotions you experience during a training cycle and then during a race itself?

Participant 8: I have only done one race but it was amazing, it took over 2hrs and struggled but felt a massive sense of accomplishment and disbelief that I had been able to finish. In training I sometimes struggle with the motivation to train and find that when I have a race, I tend to be able to convince myself more easily than when there is no race. However, I tend to think of my health and that helps get me through it.

Interviewer: during a training cycle, do you think about or are conscious about your motivation level?

Participant 8: I do think of motivation during training but usually when I am struggling.

Interviewer: when you are training or racing for that matter, do you tune into physical sensation or do you tune it out?

Participant 8: I do tune into physical sensations. Burn in my legs, heart rate, breathing. I sometimes have a swollen foot, everything seems heightened, if the fans are noy blowing right or my eater is insufficient, everything seems to become mentally taxing.