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An Existential Phenomenological Examination of Parkour and Freerunning

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AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF
PARKOUR AND FREERUNNING

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Kinesiology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Jennifer L. Clegg

August 2011

The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF
PARKOUR AND FREERUNNING

by

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY STUDIES

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2011

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ABSTRACT

AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF
PARKOUR AND FREERUNNING

by Jennifer L. Clegg

Recently, there has been growing interest among scholars in the concept of edgework to examine voluntary risk-taking behavior. Parkour is an emerging sport that finds a nexus between transgression, risk, and accessibility that may represent a unique form of edgework. Few scholars have examined sport as an edgework pursuit, and fewer still have attempted to portray the lived and embodied experiences of edgeworkers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to expand sport and edgework research by qualitatively examining the lived, sporting experiences of parkour practitioners.

Phenomenological interviews were conducted with 11 (9 male, 2 female) intermediate-to-advanced traceurs (parkour practioners) ranging from 18 to 33 years old. Two dimensions emerged: *bodily experience* and *interactive experience*. Several supporting themes also emerged, including *play, movement,* and *risk* within the bodily experience dimension, and *community, public, and world* within the interactive experience dimension. The findings of this study provide new perspectives on the experiences and meanings associated with participating in parkour and freerunning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the many people who helped this study become a reality. Here are just a few of the people whom I would like to thank:

My thesis chair, Dr. Ted Butryn, for your inspiration, support, and guidance throughout the graduate studies process, for being patient with my tangential thinking, and for setting extremely high standards – thank you;

My thesis committee, Drs. Matthew Masucci and Jessica Chin, for also demanding the best, offering great insight, and providing constant support;

My study participants for your time, energy, and willingness to approach this study in open, thoughtful, and earnest way – thank you for sharing your stories with me;

My family, for their continuous support, love, and teasing, especially about parkour as a thesis topic;

My editor(s), thank you for giving me fresh perspective and having a great eye for detail. Your help was extremely appreciated.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The emergence of "lifestyle" or risk sports has been a significant development in recent years (Wheaton, 2004). While there is a substantial body of literature examining these sports from a variety of theoretical approaches, few studies have used a perspective that views voluntary or recreational risk primarily as an experience of negotiating and transgressing boundaries (Ferrell, Milovanovic, & Lyng, 2001; Laurendeau, 2006; Lyng, 1990; Lyng & Snow, 1986). The concept of *edgework* provides a framework for researchers focusing on the social, psychological, and experiential aspects of risk-taking (Lyng, 1990) within various sport and physical activities.

Edgework refers to any activity that challenges the limits of the body and mind, thereby negotiating the "edge" of chaos and order, sanity and insanity, creativity and destruction, injury and safety, and life and death (Lyng, 1990). In his influential article on voluntary risk-taking, Lyng (1990) proposed that edgework must involve "a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence" (p. 857). Edgework pursuits typically include rock climbing, skydiving, BASE-jumping, endurance events, motorcycle/car racing, heli-skiing and snowboarding, and big-wave surfing. Lyng (1990) suggested that one of the main reasons people pursue these types of activities is for the social–psychological benefits they receive from exploring and negotiating their limits or edges. Conceptually, the focus on boundaries within edgework is essential in defining and categorizing the distinctive experiential qualities of high-risk pursuits (Lyng, 2008).

In all edgework activities, one confronts powerful sensations, perceptions and emotions that must be managed (Lyng, 2008). Participants are attracted to dangerous risk activities for the experience of fear and excitement but, more importantly, for the sense that they are maintaining control over themselves, their environment, and particularly, their mental states (Laurendeau, 2006). Empirical findings from previous edgework research suggest that engaging in high-risk pursuits increases one's sense of individual freedom, control and confidence and provides the thrill of extreme physical and emotional sensations (Lyng, 2005). Moreover, it is an opportunity for "creative, skillful, and self-determining action" (Lyng, 1990, p.877) that serves as a dramatic contrast to the mundane regimen of everyday life.

While research on risk-taking or thrill-seeking behavior has generally fallen within two major analytical frameworks related to proposed personality predispositions and the concept of intrinsic motivation, Lyng (1990) found that these models lack an explanation of risk-taking behavior from a more holistic perspective that connects relevant social and psychological factors. As a broad concept, edgework has diverse and far-reaching applications. Because the edge can be defined in many different ways, it includes a broad range of human endeavors such as graffiti writing (Ferrell, 1993, 2001), high risk finance (Smith, 2005), dangerous occupations (Lois, 2005), art viewing (Courtney, 2005), terrorism research (Hamm, 2005), and intellectual risk-taking within academic organizations (Sjoberg, 2005). Yet despite the multifarious nature of these topics, much of previous edgework inquiry has fallen firmly within two categories: activities relating to illicit and criminal behavior, and extreme sports or lifestyle pursuits.

Although not all lifestyle sports can be considered edgework, many are, and given their "alternative" nature, it is not surprising that in addition to physical risk, illicit or deviant behavior is often an identifiable, inherent, and valued part of these activities (Wheaton, 2004). For this reason, edgework theory is a particularly suitable lens through which to view these sports (Ferrell et al., 2001; Laurendeau, 2006; Lyng, 1990; Lyng & Snow, 1986).

Parkour is an emerging lifestyle sport that finds an uncommon nexus between risk, resistance, and accessibility that may represent a unique form of edgework. In this study, we seek to expand sport and edgework research by providing an in-depth examination of the lived, embodied experiences of traceurs and traceuses (men and women, respectively, who practice parkour) within the context of a risk perspective.

Parkour and freerunning are variations of a fast-growing sport that use urban architecture as a means for purposive action. While described simply as the practice of moving through the environment using only your body and your surroundings to propel yourself (Toorock, 2005), or the "art of urban adventure," the objective of parkour is to travel uninhibitedly through urban terrain by running, jumping, vaulting, leaping, and climbing over any obstacles encountered in a fluid and efficient manner (Bavinton, 2007). Freerunning, based on similar philosophy, is a more competitive, expressive, and acrobatic version of parkour (Foucan, 2008).

The proliferation of media surrounding parkour (i.e., as featured in numerous documentaries, music videos, television advertisements, and movies), a significant Internet presence, and a growing interest in lifestyle sports (Wheaton, 2004) are

important factors fueling the popularity and expansion of the practice (Saville, 2008).

Along with greater participation, however, it is increasingly evident that freerunning, in particular, is evolving into a more commercialized sporting enterprise. Confirmation that the phenomenon has made substantial inroads as an alternative, competitive sport is demonstrated in the sanctioning of international events and competitions such as the Art of Motion in Austria, and the Barclaycard Freerun World Championships in London. Additionally, the recent opening of full-time parkour and freerunning training academies (Ensign, 2009) further illustrates the sport's popularity, progression, and development.

Yet despite the growth of the sport over the last decade, parkour has received relatively little attention from scholars (Atkinson, 2009; Bavinton, 2007; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011; Saville, 2008). This small but growing body of literature, however, has revealed numerous insights and implications for future research on the sport. The research on parkour has also used several theoretical and methodological approaches, including Saville's (2008) research on the typology of fear inherent in the practice, Bavinton's (2007) examination of parkour and leisure constraints, and Atkinson's (2009) exploration of parkour as an urban "anarcho-environmental" movement. What has emerged from these previous studies is a common thread of ideas that are representative and constitutive of Lyng's (1990) edgework concept.

Edgework theory thus holds significant potential for exploration of parkour as a risk sport. Research in sport and edgework has been limited, and previous investigations within this domain have primarily used ethnographic data to illustrate the distinctive experience of risk pursuits (Ferrell et.al, 2001; Laurendeau, 2006, Lyng, 1990; Lyng &

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Snow, 1986). While this dearth of research is curious, it is also surprising that edgework,

a theoretical framework that focuses on sensation, feeling, and "ineffable" experiences

(Lyng, 1990), has not prompted research from an existential phenomenological approach.

Indeed, as Ferrell et al. (2001) describe the "ineffability of edgework – that is, the claim

by edgeworkers that the experience, indeed the meaning, of edgework can be known only

to the individual engaged in it" (p. 178), the connection of edgework and phenomenology

from a research perspective seems obvious and appropriate.

This focus of this investigation, therefore, was to explore the embodiment of

parkour as an edgework experience. Existential phenomenology, according to Dale

(1996) is the most effective approach for analyzing and conveying meaning of the "lived

body" experience in the world, especially within the context of athletic endeavors.

Interestingly, while phenomenological methods offer invaluable opportunities to learn

about athletes' experiences (Kerry & Armour, 2000), they have rarely been applied to

sports studies (Dale, 2000; Pronger, 1990; Rail, 1990; Smith, 1992; Wessinger, 1994),

and have not been used to examine parkour or other risk sports. Existential

phenomenology provides a unique framework for examining human experience in the

world, focusing on the interconnection of one's body, life's experiences and meaning

(Carmen, 2008). Comprising mutually dependent philosophies, existential

phenomenology is a research method that focuses on identifying a particular experience,

giving a full and rich account of it, and incorporating it into a "life-text" (von

Eckartsberg, 1998). Thus, according to Carmen (2008), the aim is to develop a narrative

thematic structure that will provide a broader understanding of a particular lived human experience.

Dale (2000) further emphasized existential phenomenology as a method that provides a highly detailed and nuanced portrayal of an athlete's sporting experience. Indeed, as both a philosophical position and form of inquiry, Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology offers researchers "a powerful stance from which to gather data on the embodied perspective of sports participants" (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2007, p. 117). This investigation employs an interdisciplinary approach, draws from several theoretical frameworks, and relies on an existential-phenomenological methodology to explore embodied experiences of parkour practitioners. Further, combining edgework and phenomenological frameworks acts as an example of a unique and cutting edge qualitative approach to examine sporting endeavors.

This thesis is presented in three chapters, including a proposed article for submission to *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. Chapter 1 is the thesis introduction. Chapter 2 is the first manuscript of two proposed journal articles. It is noteworthy that the following manuscript was altered from the original proposal to emphasize a purely phenomenological framework for *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*. The second proposed article (not included herein) incorporates both edgework theory and phenomenology, thereby accentuating a sociological perspective of risk-taking in parkour. Finally, Chapter 3 provides extended support material for the article, including the entire revised contents of the original proposal for this thesis. Thus Chapter 3 includes the following chapters from the original proposal:

Chapter 1, which continues the introduction of the thesis, provides background

information, and explains the need for this study; Chapter 2, the review of literature; and

Chapter 3, which describes the methods used in this study. Chapter 2, the manuscript of

the journal article, was written (and punctuated) according to the submission guidelines

for the British journal *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health.*

Chapter 2

Journal Article

An existential phenomenological examination of parkour and freerunning

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San José State University

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the embodied experiences of practitioners of parkour and freerunning. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with 11 (9 male, 2 female) intermediate-to-advanced traceurs (parkour practioners) ranging from 18 to 33 years old. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, which focuses on bodily perspective, was used to uncover and describe the meaning of these experiences. Two dimensions emerged: *bodily experience* and *interactive experience*. Several supporting themes also emerged, including *play, movement* and *risk* within the bodily experience dimension, and *community, public and world* within the interactive experience dimension. The findings of this study provide new perspectives of the experiences and meanings associated with participating in parkour and freerunning.

Keywords: parkour; freerunning; lifestyle sports; phenomenology; embodiment

Introduction

The emergence of 'lifestyle' or risk sports has been a significant development in recent years (Wheaton 2004). One factor fueling the growth in popularity of established lifestyle sports such as climbing, snowboarding, surfing, skateboarding, and those lesser known, including parkour and freerunning, is that they offer participants an 'alternative' sporting experience to those of traditional, mainstream sports. Typically embodying non-conformist values, lifestyle sports naturally appeal to those who seek unstructured, creative, anticompetitive and high-risk sporting experiences (Wheaton 2004).

Parkour is an emerging lifestyle sport that uses urban architecture as a means for purposive action (Thomson 2008). While described simply as the practice of moving through the environment using only your body and your surroundings to propel yourself (Toorock 2005), or the 'art of urban adventure', the objective of parkour is to travel uninhibitedly through urban terrain by running, jumping, vaulting, leaping, and climbing over any obstacles encountered in a fluid and efficient manner (Bavinton 2007). Freerunning, based on similar philosophy, is a more competitive, expressive and acrobatic version of parkour (Foucan 2008).

The proliferation of media surrounding parkour[1] (i.e., as featured in numerous documentaries, music videos, television advertisements and movies), a significant Internet presence, and a growing interest in lifestyle sports (Wheaton 2004) are important factors contributing to the popularity and expansion of the practice (Saville 2008). Along with greater participation, however, it is increasingly evident that freerunning, in particular, is evolving into a more commercialized sporting enterprise. Confirmation that

the phenomenon has made substantial inroads as an alternative, competitive sport is demonstrated in the sanctioning of international events and competitions such as the Art of Motion in Austria, and the Barclaycard Freerun World Championships in London. Additionally, the recent opening of full-time parkour and freerunning training academies (Ensign 2009) further illustrates the sport's popularity, progression and development. Yet despite the growth of the sport over the last decade, parkour has received relatively little attention from scholars (Atkinson 2009, Bavinton 2007, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, Saville 2008). While this small but growing body of research has revealed numerous insights about the sport, less is known about traceurs'[2] subjective experiences. Thus, we sought to answer several critical questions regarding traceurs, including: What is the lived and embodied experience of doing parkour? What are the basic constructs of this experience? How does this experience compare to other lifestyle sports and urban practices? Do the underlying philosophies of the sport affect one's experience, and if so, how?

The word 'parkour' is a derivative of the French term *parcours du combattant*, roughly translating to 'military obstacle course', or *parcourir*, which is 'to run through' (Shahani, 2008). During the 1980s in suburban Paris, the practice began as a childhood game for David Belle and Sébastien Foucan, who are widely credited with being the founders of the sport. The roots of parkour, however, can be traced back to Georges Hébert, an early 20th century French military trainer and sport theorist who became inspired by the prowess, physical abilities and movements of indigenous people (Atkinson 2009). 'Be strong to be useful' was Hébert's philosophy in developing *le methode naturelle,* or the Natural Method, a system of training the mind and body to be agile and adaptive in any situation. Comprised of ten fundamental groups of exercises (walking, running, jumping, quadrupedal movement, climbing, balancing, throwing, lifting, defending and swimming), training focused specifically on the body's physical interaction with the immediate environment (Atkinson 2009).

While the Natural Method used in military training was the original inspiration for the fast, fluid, forward movement of parkour, David Belle developed it much further, incorporating ever-greater challenges and risks within urban settings (Thomson 2008). Recognizing the need for more originality, creativity and spirituality within the discipline, Foucan (2008) adapted his style of movement into 'freerunning'.

As a sport[3] without formal rules and with many diverse styles, parkour allows great freedom of interpretation. By choosing the path, the movement, speed, obstacles, and various techniques needed to negotiate obstacles, Foucan (2008) believes the practice becomes a form of creative expression and a means of finding one's 'way'. Parkour borrows mental and spiritual elements from Eastern philosophies while emphasizing flow, harmony and fluidity; merging movement with the environment (Foucan, 2008). Nonetheless, it is understood that the more efficient and aesthetic the path and the more difficult and harrowing the terrain, the more elegant the performance is considered by traceurs (Wilkinson 2007). Foucan (2008) suggests that, ultimately, the intention is for the movement to become so instinctive and intuitive that it recedes from one's awareness and can be performed without reflection.

However, the various techniques that define parkour can also be dangerous, dramatic and socially unsettling. As Thomson (2008) notes:

> What could be more unsafe than moving across, over, between, or under the city's structures with what seems to be a joyous and blatant disregard for their intended use? Parkour, an urban practice of rapid on-foot movement that follows the maxim 'keep moving forward' seems, with its spectacular running and jumping, disconcertingly unsafe. (p. 250)

Indeed, there is significant risk and danger inherent in parkour as the 'spectacular' movement of running, jumping, flipping and vaulting is typically performed on unforgiving concrete architecture. In the continual quest to extend oneself through the physical (and mental) mastery of one's environment, the traceur takes on increasingly difficult and dangerous skills. As such, Saville (2008) contends that parkour allows an enmeshment with fear through which traceurs find new appreciation for the subtle variations of the emotion, contending that the differences 'are crucial to the way we engage in contact with the world' (p. 903).

Previous research has examined parkour from a sociological perspective. Bavinton (2007) focused on the sport's key philosophy of turning 'obstacles into opportunities'. He found that traceurs' ability to reinterpret 'space' and use it in unconventional ways upsets embedded power relations within urban settings. Bavinton reveals traceurs' awareness of the resistant or deviant nature of their unconventional use of urban space, quoting one participant:

> Urban environments are designed for one of many uses, but the aim is to restrict, direct, and slow movement. I try to practice in areas that restrict and slow me as much as possible – it appeals to my sense of defiance against all those who designed the environment to restrict and control. (p. 406)

Thus traceurs' complex negotiation of the physical and social constraints of practicing parkour contributed to their sense of agency as individuals.

Similarly, Atkinson's (2009) ethnography of Toronto-based traceurs suggests that parkour is an 'anarcho-environmental' movement that acts as a modern form of social protest. Used as a vehicle for questioning urban spatial boundaries, addressing environmental concerns, and disrupting the flow of cities' commercial spaces, parkour is a collective practice that strives to inspire urbanites to see the cityscape from a new perspective. Atkinson also described traceurs' physical experiences of movement as a flowing, 'ascetically rigorous', and anxiety-producing type of athleticism. By pushing one's own limits or boundaries, traceurs' engage in 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990) through their exploration of risk and suffering in the sport. Further, he contends that by focusing on the aesthetics and physicality of movement while communing with the urban environment, traceurs 'pursue a bodily experience that is beyond rational knowledge' (p.192). Following Atkinson (2009), we suggest that investigating traceurs' experience from a bodily perspective will shed light on the complex subjectivities of the athletes who practice parkour.

Existential phenomenology provides a unique framework for examining human experience in the world, focusing on the tension and 'interpenetration' between one's body, life's experiences and meaning (Carmen 2008). Comprising mutually dependent philosophies, existential phenomenology is a research method that focuses on identifying a particular experience, giving a full and rich account of it, and incorporating it into a 'life-text' (von Eckartsberg 1998). More specifically, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) point to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) philosophy of 'embodied consciousness' and the body *being-in-the-world* as offering a robust mechanism through which to capture a particular kind of sporting experience. Surprisingly, however, while phenomenological methods offer invaluable opportunities to learn about athletes' experiences (Kerry and Armour 2000), they have rarely been applied to sports studies (Berry *et al.* 2010, Dale 2000, Pronger 1990, Rail 1990, Smith 1992, Wessinger 1994), and have yet to be used to examine parkour or other lifestyle sports.

Based on this premise, and unlike previous, sociologically driven research on parkour, the purpose of this investigation was to explore the lived, embodied experiences of traceurs. Given the nature of parkour, traceurs' bodily experiences were inextricably linked to their interactions with others and the world around them. By studying these descriptions and the essential meanings contained therein, our research categorized the experiential data into integrated themes with both narrative and conceptual value (von Eckartsberg 1998). Understanding the lived experiences of traceurs should, therefore, provide a valuable perspective for researchers who study lifestyle or risk sports and the meanings and significance associated with these types of activities. Conversely, we hope to illustrate the many aspects of parkour that deviate from other comparable lifestyle sport experiences. Further, we also highlight the ways that parkour contributes to the literature on sport as a contested practice of cultural space, public life and urban community.

Method

Participants

Consistent with the phenomenological approach, participants were selected based on their ability to provide in-depth, detailed and relevant information about their experiences of parkour (Dale 2000). A purposeful sample of eleven men and women (9 male, 2 female) were recruited who: (1) were between the ages of 11–35 years and living in the San Francisco Bay area, (2) identified themselves as an intermediate-to-advanced traceur / traceuse with a minimum of three years experience, and (3) self-identified as being willing and able to articulate his or her experiences within the context of a phenomenological interview. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 32 years (*M*=25) and self-identified as Caucasian (5), Asian (4), Mexican-American (1) and African-American (1). Because men and women experience urban sports differently (Atencio *et al.* 2009), this study recruited both male and female participants for a more diverse set of reflections on the subject. Lastly, experienced practitioners were chosen based on the rationale that more committed and active traceurs draw from a broader experience set.

Participants were recruited via email. Email addresses were obtained through the San Francisco parkour (sfparkour.com) website 'bio' pages. After potential participants were identified, the researcher sent out preliminary instructions to each, along with a research summary guide. Moustakas (1994) suggested that the best descriptions are provided when participants have time to think about the situations they are asked to describe. The summary guide served to fully prepare the participant for the subject matter, research process, and structure of the interview. Participants were then contacted to confirm a commitment to participate in the study and to determine a convenient time and location to conduct the interview.

Bracketing Interview

Prior to the interviewing process, the researcher participated in an in-depth bracketing interview. The bracketing interview, developed from Husserl's methodology of 'phenomenological reduction' or 'epoche' helps bring researchers' assumptions and biases about the subject into awareness (Shertock 1998). It is only after suspending or bracketing preconceptions, von Eckartsberg (1998) points out, that the natural attitude of the researcher gives way to a more disciplined 'phenomenological attitude' from which he or she can grasp the essential structures of the phenomenon as they appear (p. 6). The bracketing process is essentially a form of researchers' 'radical self-examination' prior to data collection that Coliazzi (1978) calls individual phenomenological reflection (IPR). For the present study, the bracketing interview was conducted by a colleague with expertise in qualitative research.

Data Collection

Phenomenological interviews were conducted by the lead researcher to attain first-person accounts of participants' experiences in parkour. Each interview was audio-recorded, and lasted between 60 and 140 minutes. This study obtained IRB approval, and all participation was voluntary and the content of the interviews was kept confidential.

The researcher used phenomenological interviewing techniques as described by Dale (1996, 2000). This technique consists of an unstructured interviewing format, during which the participant discusses at length his or her experiences with only occasional guidance or probing from the researcher (Dale 1996). The unstructured interview is a type of in-depth, open-ended dialog that allows contemplation and moments of realization. The researcher allowed the participant to become the 'expert' while reflecting on meanings, sensations and feelings which may yield richer, more vital type descriptors that are necessary for phenomenological research (Dale 1996). Further, the researcher approached the phenomenological interview with a spirit of collaboration (Shertock 1998) and provided interviewees a receptive, non-judgemental presence.

One of the first and most critical steps of the interviewing process, according to Dale (1996), is establishing rapport between researcher and participant. During the interviews, the researcher adopted the following approach suggested by Wertz (1984 cited by Shertock 1998, p. 163) for conducting phenomenological interviews:

1. Empathetic presence to the described situation.
2. Slowing down and patiently dwelling with the participant on the details.

3. Encouraging magnification, amplification of the details.

4. Suspending disbelief and employing intense interest.

Facilitating the process, the researcher used prior educational experience conducting psychoanalytical therapy sessions to guide participants during the interview. Indeed, Dale (1996) notes that the in-depth phenomenological interview is similar to the athlete-sport psychologist interaction during a mental training session or intervention.

The interviews began with brief social conversation. Following this opening, the researcher asked the participant to take a few moments to focus on the experience of doing parkour, moments of particular awareness and impact, and the many details of the experience. After a few minutes, the researcher asked the participant to: 'Please describe the overall experience of parkour or freerunning, focusing on bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts and meanings, as well as how risk is felt within these experiences, using as much detail as possible.' A broad interview guide (Moustakas 1994) was utilised in order to facilitate dialog if participants needed guidance or were not able to tap into the experience without sufficient depth and description.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data analysis for this study was a five-step process utilising two well-established procedures, including Dale's (2000) phenomenological method, and the thematic analysis process demonstrated by Cote *et al.* (1993). The thematic analysis process was incorporated as a detailed and reliable method of understanding large quantities of data in lieu of using a research group, as proposed by Dale (2000). First, the entire transcript was read several times to get a sense of the meaning and experience as a whole (Dale 2000). Second, as an additional recommended by Sparkes (1998), ongoing peer reviews conducted by a sport studies professional (with expertise in qualitative and phenomenological methods) helped establish objectivity throughout the data analysis phase. During the initial meetings, the researcher discussed interpretations of the transcripts (i.e., perceived meanings of certain phrases or statements regarding inflection and emotion). This process established 'emerging meanings' or raw data themes (Dale, 2000) from large, loosely bound categories of text (Coté *et al.* 1993). Third, after overlapping and repetitive statements were removed, emerging meanings or 'meaning units' were coded or tagged (Coté *et al*. 1993). Tagging is a process that removes pertinent portions of data from their original context and then organises and categorises them. Following Coté *et al*. (1993), in subsequent peer reviews, the researchers discussed and agreed upon (thematic) terms that best described that particular data in order to prevent potential bias. Fourth, these tagged categories were then studied and clustered into higher order themes. Finally, the higher order themes were organised into meaningful dimensions (Dale, 1996, 2000).

Establishing validity

The validity of a qualitative study is a key criterion on which it is evaluated (Sparkes 1998). In the current study, the researcher used four important procedures to establish validity. First, the results and discussion sections of this investigation have been presented in expressive, rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the phenomenon using the

participant's voice. Dale (1996) states that within phenomenological research, a first person, evocative description of the phenomenon is an essential basis in judging a study's validity. Kerry and Amour (2000) elaborate: 'In phenomenological reduction, the task is that of describing, in textual language, what is seen and how it is experienced, the fundamental relationship between phenomenon and self' (p. 5). Therefore, if this type of description is lacking, the study will lack validity, or appropriate rigor (Dale 2000).

Second, in addition to closely following phenomenological methods (Dale 2000), the researcher chose a specific strand of phenomenology to guide this investigation (Allen-Collinson 2009). A Merleau-Pontian (1962) perspective was used to view, analyse, and describe the experience of traceurs. Further, the structure of this experience was provided, which, according to Allen-Collinson (2009) is an important aspect of phenomenological research. Lastly, Allen-Collinson notes that the phenomenological method must 'fit' the experience being investigated (2009). Merleau-Ponty's (1962) form of existential phenomenology, with its focus upon embodiment and being-in-the-world, was particularly well-suited for the in-depth portrayal of traceurs and the practice of parkour and freerunning.

Third, the researcher participated in ongoing peer reviews (mentioned previously), which contributed to interpretive accuracy, objectivity, and validity throughout the data analysis process (Sparkes 1998). During these meetings, the researcher was questioned extensively about decisions and rationale regarding various aspects of the study.

Finally, after the data analysis phase, a member check was used as a final validation technique (Merriam 2002). The member check is a verification method that involves sending each participant a copy of the manuscript and asking for feedback on whether the description of his or her experience was expressed accurately and without embellishment (Merriam 2002). Each participant individually member-checked his or her transcript; six participants gave feedback and/or clarification. That information was then studied, recorded in a written case report, and incorporated into the final draft of this project (Dale 2000).

Results

Analysis of the phenomenological interview data produced a total of 37 raw data themes. The raw data themes were then subsequently organized into 6 higher order themes, then into two general dimensions (Dale 2000). The general dimensions are *bodily experience* and *interactive experience*. The raw data themes, higher order themes and dimensions are illustrated in Figure 1.

The two general dimensions, *bodily experience* and *interactive experience*, will be discussed in the following section. In an attempt to provide vivid descriptions of this particular sporting experience, illustrative excerpts from the athletes' interviews are provided, as are connections to previous research, when appropriate.

Bodily Experience

Participants described the sensations of doing parkour or freerunning from a subjective, first-person perspective. Three major themes emerged from participants' descriptions of bodily sensations: *play* (general description)*, movement* (specific description) and *risk.*

Raw data themes	Higher order themes	General dimensions
creative outlet		
sense of play/fun		
element of surprise/spontaneity	Play	
exploration/adventure		
feeling childlike		
learning how to learn		
age issues		
individual (bodily) experiences		
feeling flow		
feeling flight	Movement	Bodily experience
feeling momentum		
feels like a video game		
falling		
managing risk		
adrenaline rush		
pushing limits/boundaries	Risk	
taking risks		
managing fear		
training with others		
connecting/community		
philosophy/politics		
inspired by/inspiring others	Community	
social comparison		
gendered perspective		
accessibility/inclusiveness		
age issues		
practicing in public		
public perception		
social responsibility		Interactive experience
'we're not skateboarders'	Public	
appropriation of public space		
dealing with authorities		
banning parkour		
interacting with environment		
relationship with environment		
environmental responsibility	World	
greater awareness		
'parkour' vision		

Figure 1 – Raw data themes and resulting higher dimensions; general dimensions.

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Play
Play alludes to the highly unstructured nature of parkour, which allows traceurs to interpret and define their sport in truly personal terms. The feeling of play was evidenced generally, as well as through participants' discussions of 'fun'. Ten of eleven participants described the practice as being a creative outlet, an extension of the playground, or a certain discipline infused with a sense of adventure and exploration. As a relatively unknown sport, one participant said that, 'It was, whatever you wanted it to be. It was such a new sport that there was so much room for innovation. Nothing had been, like, closed off yet; the boundaries hadn't been set. And so, we just started to play' (James, P2, 1)[4]. Furthermore, participants related their feelings of playing to a sense of youth and a carefree approach to being:

> It is the one thing – parkour, freerunning – not fighting, or martial arts, it is *that one thing* that returns me back to my childhood. It keeps me connected with… myself. That childlike innocence of running effortlessly, you know, through playgrounds, on jungle gyms, in hallways, darting out of the reach of my mother's hand of discipline. That is what it returns to me. So that's what I hold on to. (Nick, P8, 28)

A fundamental element of play is having fun. For these participants, the sense of having fun while practicing, training or performing parkour was universal. Eric, the one professional that participated in this study, said, 'If we're running the course, I'm not doing it just to beat the course, I'm doing it to have fun with it. And the second you stop having fun with it, then, there's really no point' (Eric, P22, 30). Similarly, for James, fun was an essential part of the experience:

> If I just want to go play, I can play better than most people on this planet. And have more fun because I'm more exhilarated because more of my body is aware of what I'm doing and how I'm doing it… And for me, it's all about getting back to that state of mind and body where the world is all about finding *as much fun* as you can before you have to close your eyes and go to sleep. (James, P6, 35)

Play is also defined by creative, unstructured learning (Brown 2009). Traceurs, for the most part, must teach themselves new physical skills. One participant described this process as 'learning how to learn', a challenging yet rewarding experience for many of the athletes who have more traditional sports backgrounds. Five participants described learning within a collaborative environment as a fun and positive experience. Expanding on this, Anson explained his own learning process in parkour:

> It's fun because you start looking at things differently. It's hard to teach yourself how to do [these moves]. And, it's *really* hard to tell someone else how their body works. But we give each other suggestions and we try to tweak our bodies in different ways to get that extra little push that we need. And it's extremely exhilarating when you finally figure something out. (Anson, P2, 4)

Movement

Movement is the second theme of the *bodily experience* dimension. Action and motion-related descriptions of the participants' corporeal experience yielded detailed, step-by-step accounts of a particular training session, a 'run' or a 'jam'. These descriptions consisted of different types of climbs, wall-runs, jumps, and for one participant, a nine-hour run through London at night, covering approximately 26 miles. The three main sensations that emerged which described movement were *flow, flight and momentum.*

Nine out of the eleven participants described their bodily experiences of parkour and freerunning as feeling like *flow* or as a flowing, continuous movement. Eric noted, 'I don't like to think of parkour in confined, individual movements. I don't like to think of it as a start and a stop. I think of it as like a magnet, it can attract something else from whichever end and you can just keep expanding it' (Eric, P9, 34). Additionally, the concept of 'flow', as defined by Csikszentmihaly (1990), was also described by six participants as the feeling they get from performing well in a training session or run, using phrases such as 'effortless', 'light', 'fast', and 'unstoppable'. James described his experience of flow as follows:

> It's like the embodiment of water. When you can flow across a terrain, and know that each individual obstacle that comes up is going to be easily tackled. And maybe not even easily, but tackled and then continued. It's the most incredible feeling, because you feel light on your feet, you feel light and able to accomplish anything. What it comes down to is that no matter where you go, no matter where you run, no matter how tired you get, if another obstacle comes up, you're going to be able to get over it. And that's just the most liberating feeling of… accomplishment. (James, P6, 21)

On a similar note, seven of the eleven participants described the perception of *flight*. One participant interpreted flight as two different sensations: the feeling of flying and escaping, saying: 'I really like the flight instinct - I like the flight part as far as being in the air, and kind of flying in a sense. But I also like being able to get away quickly. And that's what really captured me' (Michelle, P2, 20). For others, like Ian, *flight* describes the feeling of being airborne while doing a move called a 'roof gap':

> The cement ledge that I put my foot on right before the jump… that's the scariest part. That last step… when you actually leave the ground. Like even though this is the ground suspended, three stories up, you still have the sense that this is still earth. But as soon as you leave that ledge on the roof, it's just… you're leaving earth, that's all I can say. You feel weightless, and you have no time to think about anything but at the same time you feel weightless, like you could stay up there all day. I run and I throw my arms up and my chest out, my head goes up, I bring my knees up and I just hold them up there as long as I can, it just gives me so much more hang time… and then I just soar. It's so scary…but it's so freeing and liberating at the same time. (Ian, P14, 9)

An essential component of parkour is generating and sustaining forward *momentum* during runs or sequences. Seven of eleven participants noted the sensation of momentum or speed while practicing. Michelle stated:

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It kind of wakes you up inside knowing that you can be that fast. You know it's not going to slow you down when you actually have to go over an obstacle. So, it's almost like running through it as if the things aren't there. And that's… very matrix-y like. It's weird. (Michelle, P2, 17)

Risk

The experience of *risk* is the third theme of the *bodily experience* dimension. As Atkinson (2009) noted, risk is an inherent element of parkour and participants in this study described a broad spectrum of risk-taking behavior throughout their experiences – from risk-avoidance or minimization to accepting, and even seeking danger. For Nick, taking greater risk enhanced his feelings of reward:

The risk when you do these things, is… it makes it so much more worthwhile when you complete them. If there is no risk, there is no sense of true accomplishment. Because you know that you didn't sacrifice, you didn't do anything except what you normally would do. (Nick P6, 28)

However, all eleven participants described a common theme underlying their relationship with risk. Their behaviors are infrequently reckless; rather, they tend to respect, measure and manage the risks that are an intrinsic part of the sport. For traceurs like Eric, who feel the responsibility of maintaining his career, fear of injury served as a governor of his actions:

You are kind of pushing your limits and your boundaries. You're trying to do it as controlled as possible, but you're definitely always kind of towing that line and pushing yourself further as your skills grow. But to me, the risks just weren't worth it. I can't be out of work for a long period of time. I don't want to be incapacitated. I definitely don't want to do some serious damage to my body. I've been lucky that I've escaped all that so far. (Eric, P10, 3)

Other participants use phrases like 'liberating', 'freeing', 'exhilarating' and 'exciting' to describe the sensory arousal and positive affect they experience from taking risks. For Nick, risk, while an essential aspect of living his life, remains intimidating:

I don't do anything without the notion or hint of risk. It's why I live… I mean I only have one life… But I'm not sure I'm really drawn to risk as much as I'm drawn to excitement and new experiences. I think that's what really drives me. And in all honesty, I wish there was less risk, you know, I would probably do much more if there was less risk. (Nick, P5, 17)

However, one participant who was seemingly inclined to more extreme risk-taking behavior, thrives on the risk inherent in parkour:

This is slightly incriminating, but there is this building San Francisco. It's a very, very large, beautiful glass building still under construction. At this point, it was about 35 stories

high. Me and three other friends went to this building in the middle of the night. We hopped over the fence, snuck past the security guard and climbed up the 35 flights of steps. We're up there, and you know, it was one of those things where you're climbing up stairs and ladders with a little jump in between, but, you sit down and you look over this edge, and you can feel death, literally, a physical presence, right next to your shoulder. And you know that any random impulse that jerks your body in one direction or another… could mean you falling and thinking about what about what an idiot you are for the whole 35 stories. And so, what it comes down to, is, it's feeling that fear and reveling in it. It's loving the fact that you can keep going, hand after hand, foot after foot – despite the fact that you know that any false movement, any slippery rung on the ladder, any fatigue that just gets you to hold on slightly less – is going to mean falling. (James, P3, 25)

The experience of risk in parkour, for many traceurs, was viewed as a proactive engagement with fear and uncertainty as both a physical and psychological growth process.

Interactive Experience
Apart from experiences directly related to the body, parkour is a highly social and *interactive experience*. In fact, engaging with others and experiencing one's surroundings (both people and objects) were essential elements of all participants' descriptions. Traceurs rarely train alone. Most often, participants train within a small group on a regular basis (two to four times weekly), and then convene for a 'jam' with a larger regional group (30+ people) on a monthly basis. They generally train outdoors, usually in an obstacle-dense, public, urban environment. The data reflecting participants' interactive experience was organized into the following three themes: *community, public, and world.*

Interactive – community
Community is the first theme of participants' *interactive experience.* All participants identified the importance of training with others and making friends within the local community. Descriptions of these social experiences covered interpersonal, motivational and philosophical elements, each of which will be briefly discussed below.

Eight of eleven participants felt the interpersonal sense of connection and community among traceurs was a significant part of why they participate in the sport. Anson explained that 'I've never been really good with people, and it was an immediate connection. You have this shared common ground – so it was really easy to mingle' (Anson, P4, 27). Further, the unstructured, egalitarian nature of the sport lends itself to a more collaborative, supportive and nonjudgmental group dynamic. One participant described the rewarding sense of community he feels, both locally and globally:

The community as a whole is, apart from like the love of movement, is probably the biggest reason why I stay in it. There have been *many times* where I have realized that. It's so welcoming, everybody's always happy – you get a couple of people that don't see it the same way – but for the most part, you know, the majority, they are all really nice. They're all very respectful. They're all about the free flow of information and spreading knowledge and being positive. But within the larger community, one thing that I've realized more and

more is that you can literally, connect anywhere in the world and have a friend. (Eric, P11, 21)

Some described their local, core group as an 'extended family.' As Chris explained, 'We would meet up like, at least once a month. So that actually helped us develop a sense of brotherhood within the community. That's really strong… I've been part of that group for years now, and I know everybody personally and we hang out' (Chris, P12, 7).

Further, traceurs rely on their interactions with community members for motivation to keep training, learning and progressing. Nick explained:

> I like the discipline. It motivates me to want to get out more. And that's probably one of the most important factors for anyone who trains. I'm poorly motivated… So it's nice having a support group. I even feel that my success as a better traceur and parkour practitioner depends on them [the group]. (Nick, P2, 10)

Additionally, traceurs are often reluctant to train alone because the group offers a form of protection from adverse public reaction:

> I have no motivation going out and training by myself. I do it from time to time but it's kind of awkward because people [observers] aren't use to what's going on yet. And, it's not as fun, obviously. And then I always feel like I can't focus as much because I'm a little more self-conscious when I'm by myself. And it draws a little more attention when you're by yourself. If you're with a group of people, it just looks like we're all working out. But if it's just me, people are more like, 'who's that crazy guy?' but if there are other crazy people with me, then it's fine (laughs). (Zach, 4, 11)

Finally, the philosophical views of the sport were an important aspect of traceurs' community experience. All eleven participants mentioned the many differing, and at times conflicting, definitions of the sport, the philosophical approaches related to how it should be practiced, and the benefits and liabilities of its potential commercialization. One participant explained his general view:

> A big part of what we do, at least in the American scene, is we always kind of want to rationalize what we're doing. We want to make this big philosophy and bigger picture about why what we're doing is important. And I recognize that there's a little bit of ridiculousness in it. (Seth, P13, 2)

Similarly, Nicole described her challenging experience transitioning from one group's philosophical approach to another:

> [The way I was trained] there wasn't a lot of personal opinion about what movement was called, or what parkour or freerunning were defined as, and so when I came here and hooked up with some of the practitioners here and I felt some of that tension, it really turned me off, to be honest with you. (Nicole, P5, 10)

Nick added his frustration with the controversy of 'defining' the sport:

One thing that I dislike about parkour nowadays is people are starting to really… create boundaries to what it is that you can and cannot do. And I believe that boundaries and competition and like, hierarchy, are things that are going to bastardize the sport. I think we just need to be open to everybody and their own interpretations of what it is to move. (Nick, P13, 7)

Many participants discussed the commercialization of the sport as a point of philosophical contention within the parkour community. One participant noted, 'The community as a whole is fighting a lot of things – we're fighting commercialization in many respects… When that happens on a big scale, it dilutes the meaning for the people that really care about it' (Seth, P8, 19). Another added, 'I don't want it to become a whole movement. I don't want it to be a whole ideology. I don't want it to be sold as a 'package' thing… Here's your parkour 'lifestyle'. I've always kind of enjoyed that it's not as well known' (Zach P13, 9).

Therefore, because parkour is, in fact, an emerging, interactive and highly interpretive practice, traceurs' experiences were considerably affected by differing philosophical beliefs within their immediate group, and to a lesser degree, within regional and national parkour communities. These differing views directly impact traceurs' 'felt' experience by determining group dynamic, structure of practice sessions, and overall approach toward the discipline.

Interactive – public
Practicing in *public* is the second major theme of participants' *interactive experience*. Participants described interactions with pedestrians, encounters with security guards, police officers and the public at-large over concerns of self-destruction, boundary negotiation and the use of public and private space. For example, one participant described his reaction to others interjecting their opinions or feigned concern while he practices, 'You get really indignant when someone tells you that you don't know what you're doing, or when someone tells you that you could get hurt. While that may be true, why is that an issue? (laughs) Why is that your problem' (Anson, P11, 26)?

Traceurs nevertheless understood that, as representatives of a new sport, as frustrating as it may be, they should also manage their public image:

Nobody likes a freerunner except another freerunner. What we do, I mean, it scares people. It makes you think, well, why is this person running? Are they trying to rob someone, or are they trying to get away? So I've had to stop on just about every single run that I've ever been on and talk to concerned or angry people. (James, P8, 36)

Indeed, traceurs are aware that their and their group's initial impression on others is often based on negative stereotypes. One participant pointed out, 'Anytime you see a group of like, five or more teenaged boys, most people have this… certain reaction, like they must be up to no good' (Chris, P13, 7).

Furthermore, participants overwhelmingly believed that their ongoing battle for use of public space must be one that is waged in a civil and peaceful manner, effectively disassociating themselves from the more anti-authoritarian urban sport of skateboarding (Beal 1995). One participant discussed the fine line between 'exercising' and doing parkour in sensitive areas:

So whenever we deal with security, we're always very respectful and we leave. But inside, I'm pissed off because I'm thinking, ok, you are going to kick me out of 'private' property? That's what they always say – it's 'private property'. So what if I'm on a jog, I have my sweatband on, I have my Gatorade, I'm jogging through there? You're not going to say anything. But as *soon* as I do anything that's like, risky, like if I'm running and I jump over something, it's like, 'oh no, you can't do that here'. (Zach, P4, 46)

Training in public spaces also promoted feelings of self-consciousness for a significant number of traceurs (evident in Zach's previous quote regarding group training and motivation). In addition to their concern about security guards and public reaction, traceurs were also especially self-aware while learning new skills or attempting high-risk moves with onlookers present.

Interactive – world
The third and final theme of participants' *interactive experience* involved their interconnectedness with the *world* around them. Nine of the eleven participants discussed their experiencing the world (both natural and built) in new ways. Having a greater awareness of one's body, environment, and the immediate moment was a common sensation for participants in this study. One traceur stated:

You feel alive. A lot of people describe it that way. You're feeling sunshine, you're smelling the fresh air, you're smelling the trees and the earth. And you know, you're not putting yourself above it, looking down. You're in it. You're interacting with it. And you're not interacting with it in a way that's destructive. You're becoming a part of it and experiencing it that way. It kind of… gives you energy. You pull the energy from the earth and the environment and from the other people around you feel invigorated by it. (Seth, P8, 37)

Eight of the eleven participants also described having a special, new acuity within their urban landscape called 'parkour vision'. A known term within the sport, it is the perceived ability of traceurs to see the world around them differently and being open to new 'freedom and possibilities'. One participant noted, 'I see the architecture and I see this huge playground everywhere I go' (Nicole, P5, 43). Another elaborated:

It changes the way you look at things because instead of just being architecture, now it has a meaning. You assign a purpose to it. And once it has a purpose, it's changed. It's not just a wall, it's 'what can I use this wall for?' (Zach, P8, 43)

Eric added:

You don't look at the world as buildings, stairs, trees, fences, grass. You look at is as: wall run, back flip, kong, roll, whatever. And I think that's a really cool thing – it's a lot of fun because it makes the world seem more interesting. (Eric, P4, 3)

Further, because it is mostly an urban sport, traceurs develop a keen awareness of the city landscape and a new appreciation for particular materials within that environment. For example, Chris explained his unique relationship with concrete:

When I encounter certain types of concrete I definitely feel… this sense of excitement, giddiness. I'm very comfortable with it. I can commune with it in a way that non-traceurs can't really. And it's just a result of being, mostly, well, you're interacting with it, it's almost like you trust it. You really have to know it, interact with it, know exactly all its borders, know it inside and out, have a spatial-awareness of it, be familiar enough with it to know if you can slip or not, how high it is, how hard it is, and if you crash down on it, how much it hurts. Some concrete is harder than others – granite's the worst. Some kinds of concrete, for some reason, it just doesn't feel that bad when you crash on it. (Chris, P7, 33)

Indeed, traceurs' utilization of, and contact with, diverse elements within the urban and natural environment provided new perspectives of architecture, city space and nature, and thus a greater sense of connection to the world around them.

Discussion

Eleven traceurs described their experiences of parkour in open-ended phenomenological interviews. The overall structure that emerged consists of two dimensions (*bodily experience, interactive experience*), and six supporting themes (*play, movement, risk, interactive-community, interactive-public,* and *interactive-world)*. While some of the themes that emerged from this study support previous research on parkour (Atkinson 2009, Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011, Bavinton 2007, Saville 2008), and other lifestyle sports experiences (Wheaton 2004), this phenomenological analysis of parkour has uncovered significant new details regarding the varied aspects, social elements, and physical sensations of the practice. It has also revealed a broad structure of the experience and provided a delineation of the major themes not found in previous research. Further, the findings suggest several implications for future investigations.

Play

Lifestyle sports and activities are characterized by what Wheaton calls a 'participatory ideology' that promotes fun, involvement, 'flow' Csikszentmihalyi (1990), risk, and self-actualization along with other intrinsic rewards (2004, p. 11). Although these elements were consistent with traceurs' experiences of parkour revealed in this study, the word 'play' was overwhelmingly used by participants to describe their bodily experience. Given the unstructured and play-based ethos of parkour, this description may seem somewhat obvious. In fact, the elements of play in parkour are perhaps so straightforward that this area has been overlooked in previous research. While play is generally regarded as natural, necessary and beneficial for all ages (Brown 2009), certain societal standards

dictate acceptable forms of play for adults (i.e., structured, established sports and conformance to societally-acceptable uses of public space). Parkour, representing an embodiment of play borne from playgrounds and obstacle courses, does not always fit these standards. Traceurs discussed the societal judgment and scrutiny they sometimes feel 'playing' as adults. As one participant said, 'As adults no one like to call it 'playing' because that's like, childish, juvenile, all those words…It's embarrassing to get caught by security or police doing something that the world may think you should've outgrown, 10 or 15 years ago' (Chris, P11, 27). Thus, while acknowledging the importance of play and the meaning of parkour in their lives, traceurs nevertheless felt at times judged by others regarding their age and what constitutes 'appropriate' adult behavior.

Movement
'Flow', 'flight', and 'momentum' were terms that emerged from participants' descriptions of the feelings of movement in parkour. While both Atkinson (2009) and Wheaton (2004) highlight the concept 'flow' as part of the physical experience of participating in parkour and other lifestyle sports, similarly, the sensations of 'flow' and 'momentum' were frequently mentioned by this study's traceurs within the broader theme of 'movement'. 'Flow', in particular, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is a state of optimal experiencing, involving total absorption in a task or activity. Flow activities, especially those that emphasize a challenging, forward, and fluid movement such as parkour can 'provide a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into new reality' (1990, p.74). Although traceurs in this study described achieving flow states, or 'being in the zone', they did not imply that they felt this on a 'quasi-regular' basis, in contrast to Atkinson's (2009) findings. Instead, participants emphasized appreciating the everyday pleasure of being able to move a certain way, whether or not it was an optimal or flow experience. For example, one participant said, 'I feel there's this innate desire to move this way, and the more I do it, the better I feel…and the more comfortable I am in my body' (Chris, 13, 32).

Further, while the sensation of 'flight' may be experienced in broad spectrum of lifestyle sports, 'flight' in parkour can also mean 'escape'. Importantly, for many traceurs, the underlying purpose and meaning of parkour is to have a useful and efficient body. Thus parkour's 'be strong to be useful' philosophy differentiates it from other lifestyle sports in important ways. While Atkinson (2009) found that traceurs embrace much of the philosophy and practice as a form of social critique, the traceurs in this study were more concerned about parkour being functional, such as learning to traverse the natural and urban environment and being able to escape or flee dangerous situations. For example, one participant explained that his parkour training and technical skills would be invaluable in the aftermath of an earthquake. As such, traceurs felt a sense of importance and purpose in their training beyond the playful, creative and social elements.

Risk

Risk-taking behavior is characteristic of many lifestyle sports, including parkour (Atkinson 2009, Saville 2008, Wheaton 2004). Nonetheless, in contrast to much of the media attention and spectacle surrounding some of the sport's more dangerous moves, for various reasons traceurs in this study universally rejected that it is a 'high-risk' activity. Traceurs learn a progression of skills over the course of months and years to slowly build the strength and technique to perform the riskier, more challenging jumps. They often using a checklist of preparations before performing high-risk moves, including looking for dust, condensation, or other elements that may cause them to slip while landing or gripping a wall, checking the stability of obstacles, etc., to reduce the possibility of injury. Traceurs insist that by proactively managing and minimizing risks, parkour is a fundamentally safe sport. This finding is consistent with recent research on parkour and public policy in the U.K., which contends that the practice provides an opportunity for young people to 'experience risk and adventure in a relatively safe way' (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, p.124). The data from the present study also revealed two factors that tended to moderate risk-taking behavior: 1) age – adult traceurs (in their late 20s to early 30s) took significantly less risk than younger traceurs, and 2) having been previously injured in the sport. Many traceurs described a new appreciation for fear and the consequences of risk-taking after being injured. Furthermore, they recognized the benefits of accepting and engaging with their fear as part of their everyday training. Indeed, this observation is compatible with Saville's (2009) insights about how fear is 'played with' and embraced by traceurs in surprising ways.

In general, we found that traceurs' management of fear and risk was a focused, ongoing and substantial aspect of their practice which proactively and effectively reduced unnecessary risk-taking and overall injury rates. As such, it was interesting that traceurs' appreciation and management of risk was still evident. Declarations of awe towards others' risk-taking were numerous: 'You can not *believe* what [moves] some guys are throwing now' (James, P5, 12). The practice of distinguishing risk-takers, however, is common throughout lifestyle sports. In urban skateboarding, for example, Atencio *et al.* (2009) assert that risk is used as the 'primary social mechanism' through which skaters gained legitimacy or authenticity (p.10). While we found this not to be the case in parkour, it was nevertheless apparent that certain types of risk-taking behavior were (indirectly) valued and used as a means of achieving distinction among traceurs.

Interactive-community

In addition to traceurs' bodily experience, the other significant dimension of this study was their interactive experience. As found in investigations of many other lifestyle sports, parkour exemplifies individualistic attitudes and practices, yet thrives on well-developed and closely-knit local and regional *communities*. In fact, the subcultural communities that exist within many lifestyle sports have been a significant focus of recent sociological research (e.g. Atkinson and Young 2008, Beal 1995, 1996, Wheaton, 2004).

In this study, three significant elements emerged from traceurs' descriptions of their interactive experiences training within the parkour community: interpersonal, motivational, and philosophical. First, traceurs' interpersonal connections formed within

the broader, local communities are meaningful to them; sometimes described as a 'brotherhood' or an 'extended family'. Often, a smaller 'core' group will form within the local community, which generally consists of highly dedicated traceurs who train together daily. However, while they appreciate the diverse yet like-minded 'core' group for social and emotional reasons, traceurs also rely heavily on each other for motivation, learning, and progression within their practice. Traceurs, having a wide variety of athletic backgrounds, offer diverse perspectives and opinions to one another on how to create, acquire and link new skills. There is a palpable spirit of collaboration and inclusion that sets parkour apart from other subcultural communities such as skateboarding (Atencio *et al.* 2009), which has increasingly 'aligned itself with a 'street' and anti-social attitude' (p.6). Indeed, traceurs revealed that parkour's non-hierarchal and accessible group dynamic was highly appealing and unique in comparison with other traditional or lifestyle sports.

Exploring this theme further, the results of this study were largely consistent with Gilchrist and Wheaton's (2011) description of the open-minded and inclusive nature of parkour as one that encourages and supports newcomers, beginners, 'outsiders' and women (p.122), and is structured less by 'hegemonic masculinity' than is prevalent in other sports (p. 123). The two female traceurs that participated in this study supported and expanded on this notion. In fact, one traceur said that she was actively recruited to practice with members of one parkour community. This directly contrasts with what Atencio *et al.* (2009) found regarding the hierarchal gender relations and the marginalization of females in urban or 'street' skateboarding. Yet even as the women of this study claimed that the groups were welcoming and unintimidating to them, the female traceurs nevertheless felt the need to 'step it up'. As one participant said, 'When I'm training with group of guys, I like to go a little harder just so that when other girls come out they don't put them on the sidelines or something' (Michelle, P7, 4). Michelle's sentiment of feeling motivated to 'prove herself' within an essentially male domain was comparable to some female skaters' experiences. Also consistent with Atencio *et al.* (2009), we found that while the female traceurs in this study practiced primarily with men, they enjoyed and benefited from training with other women. However, clear differences between female skaters and parkour traceurs were apparent. For example, while female skaters tended to convene for sanctioned 'All Girl' events, traceurs were more self-organizing. Indeed, one of the female participants formed a women's training group within the local community that met once a week.

Lastly, the philosophical aspect of traceurs' experience which emerged from this study revealed differing opinions on issues relating to commercialization and competition, and more significantly, how parkour should be defined and practiced within the community. Most participants opposed commercialization of the sport, which is generally consistent with views of other traceurs (Atkinson 2009) and lifestyle sport participants (Wheaton 2004). Further, without a market for gear or equipment, traceurs believe that parkour may avoid the undesirable fate of being 'branded' as many other lifestyle sports have been. Traceurs acknowledged that while freerunning competition will continue to develop and proliferate, they personally had no interest in performing or competing (with one 'professional' participant being the exception). Overall, having a

similar training philosophy emerged as the critical factor in maintaining the cohesion of the local, 'core' groups, rather than a shared view regarding the larger ideological positions of the sport.

Interactive-public

As an urban-based practice, traceurs' interaction with the *public* (pedestrians, spectators, security guards) was the second theme that emerged in this study which described the interactive experience of parkour. Traceurs talked at length about 'being watched' and feeling self-consciously aware while training in the public eye, which supports Rinehart's (2000) observation that the 'presentation of the self to others' and 'being seen' is an important part of the lifestyle sport experience. Most traceurs believed that being observed by others (including fellow traceurs) was both motivating and distracting to their practice: 'I like it when people watch…but I'm also uncomfortable with the thought of getting hurt in front of somebody or a group of people… or doing something just generally badly, or wrong' (Chris, P1, 8). Parkour also generates significant public attention (as a relatively unknown sport) therefore magnifying traceurs' feelings of social evaluation.

Notably, the traceurs interviewed were concerned with the public perception of parkour due to frequent comparisons with urban skateboarding. In fact, traceurs described being hyperaware of their actions reflecting on the entire parkour community, and that respectful interaction with onlookers and security guards was essential to the reputation of the sport as a peaceful and responsible practice. As such, traceurs attitudes were somewhat inconsistent with Atkinson's (2009) research which found that parkour was used as form of social protest and/or critique regarding urban environments and public city space. While appropriating public space is a part of the practice, traceurs in the present study did not state or imply that they used parkour as a tool to make a larger societal statement within urban spaces. In contrast, some traceurs in the study took direct action to ensure they operated within societal boundaries by contacting local and/or city officials to explain their plight and seek more sanctioned city spaces in which to practice.

Interactive-world

The third and final theme of interactive experience was *world*. Traceurs expressed feeling connected to and 'oneness' with their environment, similar to practitioners other lifestyle sports such as climbing, surfing and snowboarding (Midol and Broyer 1995). Yet as an urban practice, traceurs described a connection to man-made, city surfaces and objects, including concrete, stucco, granite, rain gutters, rails, walls, roofs and scaffolding. These unusual associations within the cityscape provide traceurs with a different perspective of the city – a phenomenon known within the sport as 'parkour vision'. Philosophically, parkour differs from other lifestyle sports by not using any type of gear or equipment. As one participant explained, 'We separate ourselves by specifically invoking the environment – we use the world, the obstacles, *as* our equipment' (Anson, P6, 24). In doing so, traceurs experience a wide spectrum of natural and urban obstacles and environments with their bodies; direct contact with the world is the point. Traceurs, for this reason, address environmental concerns (see Atkinson 2009) as a part of their

practice. Indeed, a campaign called 'Leave No Trace' was initiated by San Francisco-based traceurs as an effort to clean up and sustain the city spaces they used for their practice. Parkour is thus strikingly distinct as an urban sport which is equally or more concerned with numerous realms of moral and ethical responsibility than typical 'environmentally conscious' non-urban lifestyle sports.

Conclusion

By examining parkour and freerunning from a phenomenological perspective, we believe we have illustrated, in great detail, the unique qualities of this sporting experience and revealed perspectives and information which were not apparent from prior research. In this study certain dimensions emerged, enabling the researcher to establish a common structure of the experience and to then delineate and explore the supporting themes for greater meaning and significance.

Despite this study's yielding insights into traceurs' lived experiences, there were limitations to this investigation. In particular, data that related to traceurs' discussion of psychosocial benefits from participating in parkour were not used, as these were categorized as affective outcomes rather than a direct experience. Further, this study investigated only one regional group of traceurs, which may hold similar views, understandings and practices of the sport. Finally, while women's experiences of parkour were touched upon within this investigation, it is an area that holds significant potential for future research, particularly within the context of urban lifestyle sports.

Notes

1. Although the word 'traceuse' can be used for female traceurs, for the purposes of this study, 'traceur' was used to describe both male and female practitioners.
2. The word 'parkour' was used throughout this paper to describe both parkour and freerunning, except when distinctions between the two were made.
3. While 'sport' is a more apt description of competitive freerunning, it is used in this paper to describe parkour as well, along with 'discipline' and 'practice.'
4. Locations of direct quotes from the participants' transcripts are referenced using the following format: participant name (pseudonym), page number (P), line number (in which the quote begins).

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Chapter 3

Extended Support Material

Introduction

Statement of purpose. The purpose of this study was to explore traceurs' lived, embodied experiences of risk in parkour using existential phenomenological research methods.

Significance of study. Examining parkour from a risk perspective has revealed a unique combination of elements that have not been identified within other edgework sports. Moreover, by using existential phenomenology to analyze traceurs' embodied perspective, this study provides a nuanced view of risk-taking in sport and a detailed description of parkour and freerunning, yielding a new type of subjective knowledge within sport studies literature.

This study was concerned with participants' sensory experience of physical risk and socially deviant behavior inherent in training for and performing parkour. Negotiating these two forms of risk, or edges, offer traceurs a powerfully dynamic edgework experience. This examination, therefore, has contributed to a greater understanding of the essence of these experiences and the deeper meanings associated with subversive risk pursuits. Unquestionably, parkour and freerunning have captured the public imagination as an accessible, alternative sport representing freedom, imagination and possibility. Beneath the surface, however, we find a more complex, contradictory and valorized practice with its many disparate qualities often portrayed in a

heroic and exaggerated manner (Saville, 2008). The phenomenological research methods used in this study have revealed a rich and detailed narrative describing the lived experience of traceurs. Therefore, this in-depth, interdisciplinary investigation of parkour has yielded several valuable insights about traceurs' experiences and thus helps lay the groundwork for future sports studies research.

Limitations.

1. It is not possible to know whether participants have overstated, embellished, or falsely represented his or her experiences.

Delimitations.

1. The study was delimited to 11 participants (9 men and 2 women) who self-identified as intermediate-to-advanced traceurs. Participants had a minimum of 3 years of experience, which indicated a higher level of dedication (in a relatively new sport). Additionally, the traceurs that were chosen trained on a regular basis, and embraced and identified with parkour philosophy and lifestyle. This information was ascertained through pre-interview conversations in person or on the telephone.

2. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 33 years old.

3. The participants were volunteers from the Bay Area of California. Emails were sent through the San Francsisco parkour (sfparkour.com) website asking for volunteers who fit the aforementioned criteria.

Definition/description of terms.

1. Critical Mass

Critical Mass is a militant bicycling movement that began in San Francisco in 1992. Typically held the last Friday of every month, Critical Mass rides take place in over 300 cities around the world. The movement was founded with the idea of drawing attention to how unfriendly the city was to bicyclists (Ferrell, 2001).

2. Dis-organizations

Dis-organizations are loosely organized events with intentions of disrupting or disorganizing urban logic, usually related to consumption, traffic or authority (Ferrell, 2001).

3. D.I.Y. movements

D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) culture emerged as a part of the countercultural movements of the 1960s in the US. Individuals who participate in D.I.Y. movements tend to value independence from formal networks and corporate structures and view their activities and identities as being 'self-made' (Ferrell, 2002).

4. Edgework

Edgework is a theoretical framework used to explore the social and psychological factors and motivations of voluntary risk taking activities (Lyng, 1990).

5. Existential phenomenology

Philosophical approach to understanding the lived experience, embodied consciousness, and experience of the body *being-in-the-world* (Merleu-Ponty, 1962). It is a perspective that emphasizes the mind-body nexus and "the

here and now of bodily existence and presence" (Munch, 1994, p.151).

6. Freerunning

    Freerunning is a variation of parkour developed by Sebastien Foucan (2008) that

    allows more freedom, creativity and expression of movement to fit an individual's

    strengths and weaknesses.

7. Parkour

    The word *parkour* is a derivative of the French term *parcours du combatant,*

    which roughly translates to military obstacle course. It is the sport and art of

    traversing the urban environment in the quickest, most efficient and fluid manner,

    involving running, jumping, leaping, climbing, and vaulting to overcome any

    obstacles encountered (Foucan, 2008). For this study, 'parkour' is used as a

    collective term for 'parkour and 'freerunning'

8. Run

    Organized through websites, a run is the actual "performance" of parkour,

    tracing a line through the city, with local traceurs. (Bavinton, 2007).

9. Social deviance

    Social deviance is any type of behavior within a public space that is "markedly

    different from the norm" (Galloway, 2006).

10. Traceur / traceuse

    Name for men and women, respectively, who practice parkour and freerunning.

    The word *traceur* alludes to the idea of tracing a line through the city. For this

    study, to simplify, the word 'traceur' is used for both 'traceurs' and 'traceuses.'

11.	Urbanfreeflow.com

Urban Freeflow is the "official" global parkour / freerunning website based in London, UK. It is responsible for the organization, promotion, branding, and business of the sport while providing articles on philosophy, training, technique, history, and current events. David Belle and Sebastian Foucan, the founders of the sport, have contributed to much of the philosophical and technical content of this website.

Review Of Literature

Understanding various perspectives of voluntary risk pursuits requires a familiarity with the literature. The literature pertinent to this study will be drawn from two primary areas. First, sport and edgework research will be reviewed, with a particular emphasis on sensation, skills, and experiential elements. Next, research relating to edgework and social deviance, urban disruption, and urban resistant sports will be covered.

This literature review also includes a discussion of qualitative research in sport, existential phenomenology, and phenomenological research methods in sport. However, it is helpful to begin with a brief overview of the history, practice, and theory of parkour.

Introducing parkour. The word *parkour* is a derivative of the French term *parcours du combattant*, roughly translating to "military obstacle course," or *parcourir*, which is "to run through" (Shahani, 2008). Beginning in the 1980s in suburban Paris, the practice started as a childhood game for David Belle and Sébastien Foucan, who are widely credited with being the founders of the sport. The roots of parkour, however, can

be traced back to Georges Hébert, an early 20th century French military trainer and sport theorist who became inspired by the prowess, physical abilities and movements of indigenous people (Atkinson, 2009).

"Be strong to be useful" was Hébert's philosophy in developing *le methode naturelle,* or the Natural Method, a system of training the mind and body to be agile and adaptive in any situation. Comprised of ten fundamental groups of exercises (walking, running, jumping, quadrupedal movement, climbing, balancing, throwing, lifting, defending and swimming), training focused specifically on the body's physical interaction with the immediate environment (Atkinson, 2009). Following Hébert, a Swiss architect inspired by the method designed outdoor obstacle courses called *parcours* for parks and recreational areas (Wilkinson, 2007).

While the Natural Method used in military training was the original inspiration for the fast, fluid, forward movement of parkour, David Belle developed it much further, incorporating ever-greater challenges and risks within urban settings (Thomson, 2008). Recognizing the need for more originality, creativity, and spirituality within the discipline, Foucan (2008) developed his style of movement into *freerunning*. The recent rapid expansion of the sport is largely due to video-sharing websites like YouTube and the collective force of Urban Freeflow, the official website of parkour and freerunning situated in the United Kingdom (Bavinton, 2007). A vast global network, Urban Freeflow represents each discipline equally and is responsible for the promotion, branding, and "business" of the sport, while providing numerous articles on philosophy, history, training, and current events.

As a sport without formal rules and with many diverse styles, parkour allows great freedom of interpretation. By choosing the path, the movement, speed, obstacles, and various techniques needed to negotiate obstacles, Foucan (2008) believes the practice becomes a form of creative expression and a means of finding one's "way."   Parkour borrows mental and spiritual elements from Eastern philosophies. It emphasizes flow, harmony and fluidity, merging movement with the environment (Foucan, 2008). Nonetheless, it is understood that the more efficient and aesthetic the path, and the more difficult and harrowing terrain, the more elegant the performance is considered by traceurs (Wilkinson, 2007). Foucan (2008) suggests that, ultimately, the intention is for the movement to become so instinctive and intuitive that it recedes from one's awareness and can be performed without reflection.

However, the various techniques that define parkour are also dangerous, dramatic and socially unsettling. As Thomson (2008) suggests:

> What could be more unsafe than moving across, over, between, or under the city's structures with what seems to be a joyous and blatant disregard for their intended use? Parkour, an urban practice of rapid on-foot move-ment that follows the maxim "keep moving forward" seems, with its spectacular running and jumping, disconcertingly unsafe. (p. 250)

Indeed, there is significant risk and danger inherent in parkour as the "spectacular" movement of running, jumping, flipping, and vaulting is typically performed on unforgiving concrete architecture. In the continual quest of expanding oneself through the physical (and mental) mastery over one's environment, the traceur takes on increasingly difficult and dangerous skills. Thus, along with greater risk-taking, fear asserts itself as a central emotional component of the practice.

Saville (2008) investigated fear as a "mobile" emotion that is experienced in practicing parkour. In the researcher's engagement with the practice, he found that fear is a broad, multilayered and situated emotion; it is a "type of contact with the world and the description of it only makes sense when we account for both the feelings and the place" (Saville, 2008, p. 910). The flowing nature of the movement, substantial risk, and physical involvement with "place" allows traceurs to engage, "play" with, and discover fear in new ways. While generally depicted as a negative emotion, fear that is linked to movement and space (as found in parkour) becomes a mobile emotion that has numerous layers and intensities that may have many positive effects. For Saville (2008), parkour allows an enmeshment with fear through which traceurs find new appreciation for the subtle variations of the emotion, contending that the differences "are crucial to the way we engage in contact with the world" (p. 903). Parkour, therefore, is a practice that facilitates a traceur's exploration, understanding, refinement, and enjoyment of fearful emotions (Saville, 2008).

However, while risk, danger, and fear are inherent in the sport, the point is not to showcase flamboyant maneuvers; each movement must have purpose and intention (Foucan, 2008). The practice of parkour is based on escaping imminent danger. As David Belle explains, "if you're really thinking about how to defend yourself, how to be useful, then that's a very different mindset for just doing things to look good" (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 45). Moreover, parkour theorists believe that practitioners who strictly practice dangerous and spectacular techniques for their performative value serve to dilute parkour's philosophy and purpose (Atkinson, 2009).

In fact, the ability to escape danger and develop greater survival skills is the primary motivation behind the practice. Wilkinson (2007) notes that traceurs believe that much of the instinctual nature of the body has been lost in our modern, technologically advanced society. In more philosophical terms, man's quest to transcend his natural "animal" state, Becker (1973) argues, subjugates him to a certain disconnect between his conscious mind and body. Foucan and Belle understand this idea well – both have stated that their inspiration for the movement of parkour has come from animals, particularly cats and monkeys (Foucan, 2008). This perceived loss of a physical connection between the body and environment and the ability to move within it naturally and efficiently is reflected in this statement on the Urban Freeflow website:

> The idea of the chase captures the movement of parkour quite well. In fact, it is the form of movement that our ancient ancestors may have used to hunt food, or escape predators on the plains of Africa. There is certainly an instinctual quality to it. In adapting instantaneously to whatever comes forth without thinking about it, we naturally flow over and around all obstacles. In practicing parkour, we are reviving and honing that ancient instinct. (Toorock, 2005)

Indeed, "reviving and honing" the survival instinct, a mental and physical capacity, is the original and enduring philosophy of the practice (Wilkinson, 2007). Further though, it implies defensive posturing, self-preservation, and regressing, in a sense, to move and react with animal instincts.

Many survival skills used in edgework sports that explore boundaries of life and death are more than just a practice; they are a necessity. The inherent survival capacity needed within many edgework pursuits will be discussed in the following paragraphs

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along with research on sport and edgework, focusing on the qualities, emotions and sensations of risk as it relates to various sporting endeavors.

Edgework and sport. Edgework is a theoretical framework used to examine the motivations of individuals who pursue voluntary risk activities (Lyng, 1990). Lyng's (1990) concept of edgework was developed from empirical data emerging from his previous participant-observation study on skydivers (Lyng & Snow, 1986). Relevant to the current discussion, his data yielded findings in three main areas: "1) the types of activities that qualify as edgework, 2) the specific individual characteristics and capacities that are relevant to the edgework experience, and 3) the subjective sensations associated with participation in edgework" (1990, p. 857). Lyng (1990) contends, however, it is the consistency of the personal, subjective experiences across vastly different types of edgework that lends support to the validity of the concept.

The subjective edgework experience consists of four distinct sensations: excitement, hyperreality (i.e. experiences that feel more real than everyday life), self-determination, and fear of failure (Lyng, 1990, p.860). The following engagement with the literature will focus primarily on individual-level factors related to edgework sports, including capabilities and skills, and emotion and sensation. Skydiving and BASE-jumping, the quintessential edgework sports, will be examined along with Csikszentmihaly's (1990) flow concept.

Edgework skills and sensations. Edgeworkers believe that one of the most valuable aspects of the edgework experience is developing and honing the technical skills and abilities that are required of the sport or activity (Lyng, 1990). Of course, while the

emphasis on highly skilled performance is characteristic of edgework, it is not unique to risk activities. What is unique, Lyng found, is that edgeworkers believe they possess a certain innate competence, or a special "survival instinct" that allows them to maintain control of a situation that verges on complete chaos. Specifically, it is the ability to avoid being paralyzed by fear and to focus one's attention on what is crucial for survival (Lyng, 1990). Therefore, these athletes must be equally confident in their physical, sport-specific skills and mental capabilities in confronting and overcoming danger. Importantly, Lyng (1990) stated that the opportunity to exercise their survival skills is what edgeworkers value most from their experiences.

Laurendeau's (2006) ethnography of skydivers explored a specific aspect of the survival instinct: the "illusion of control." Providing a detailed look into the psychological negotiation of skydiver's perception and meaning of risk, he contends that feelings of being in control, whether rational or not, were employed as a significant coping mechanism. Further, Laurendeau (2006) suggested that the survival instinct that many skydivers believe is "transferable across activities, intersects with experiential knowledge and social experience, and is specific to particular risk activities" (p. 600). While the level and necessity of survival skills vary with different types of edgework, skydiving is undeniably one of the more extreme risk experiences. Laurendeau's (2006) profile explains how the extensive rationalization process within a skydiver's belief system – relating to accidents, equipment failure, technical skills, innate capabilities, and even the role of fate in life and death – is a type of psychological "armor" needed for long-term participation in the sport.

Ferrell et al. (2001) addressed the intensity of fear, the defining sensation of edgework, as an emotion both celebrated and respected by BASE-jumpers. Perhaps the ultimate extreme sport, BASE-jumping (Buildings, Antenna, Span or bridges, and Earth) is a distinctly underground, mostly illegal practice that involves parachuting off fixed objects. Usually performed at night, this sport requires precise and immediate reaction time, body positioning, and mental capabilities combined with substantial preparation, which usually includes trespassing, picking locks, jumping fences, or what Ferrell (2001) described as the "aggressive appropriation of public and private space" (p.80). Ferrell et al. (2001) note that "Know Fear" t-shirts are popular among jumpers, both as a statement and one-upmanship of other extreme sports that identify with the highly commercialized "No Fear" clothing company; however, the symbolism is noteworthy. In confronting the intense emotional demands of a jump – fearing death, serious injury, equipment failure, "brain lock", or arrest after landing – BASE-jumpers must be able to focus the mind and stay calm under chaotic circumstances. In other words, to "know fear," and one's ability to react to fear is essential for survival (Ferrell et al., 2001).

Significantly, however, Ferrell et al.'s (2001) ethnography on BASE-jumping culture and media practices (video-recording themselves and others) illustrated the intensity of emotion and "ephemeral moments" of fear and euphoria experienced during a jump were relived, reformed or elongated through video practices. The researchers argued that the addictive nature of the transcendent moment is an important factor in explaining the "pervasiveness of mediated practices and image production in edgeworking communities and in other illicit worlds" (2001, p.179). As such, this

experiential mix of physical and criminal risk functions as a form of "defiant" edgework, the illegality simply enhancing the excitement and sensation, and the video camera capturing and intensifying these moments which can then be shared and relived by jumpers.

Edgework sensations are in many ways similar to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of *flow,* which is often experienced in sport or other highly-focused activities. Flow states involve deep yet relaxed concentration, a distorted sense of time, a sense of control, a merging of one with the environment or "objects at hand," and feelings of personal transcendence and autonomy (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). However, Lyng (1990) notes that the difference between edgework and flow lies within the "enjoyable middle regions" of experience, which defines flow activities (p. 863). As previously mentioned, edgework experiences are extreme in nature, and generally associated with "anxiety-producing chaos" (Lyng, 1990). Additionally, while flow states involve a "loss of self-consciousness" (Csikszentmihaly, 1990), edgework generally "stimulates a heightened sense of self and a feeling of omnipotence," sensations often described as self-determination or self-actualization (Lyng, 1990, p. 863). While more research is needed, Lyng (1990) hypothesizes that the edgework experience may be a distinct subset or a different dimension of the same phenomenon as the flow concept.

Diverging from the embodied experience of edgework, the following section will discuss current research relating to subcultures and gender within sport and edgework literature. Specifically, these perspectives highlight the important elements of identity, relationships, and communities constructed from participation in edgework sports.

Alternative perspectives in sport and edgework. Exploring the growing influence

of subcultures, Lyng (2008) points out that sport and edgework research has focused

primarily on high-risk lifestyle sports (Ferrell et al., 2001; Laurendeau, 2006; Lyng &

Snow, 1986; Lyng, 1990, 2005). Certainly, while risk and injury are present in most

competitive sports, alternative or extreme sports are more often defined by risk-taking

behavior. Distinguishing between the two, Lyng (2008) suggests that within edgework

sports, "risk taking is the primary goal of the sporting enterprise rather than a means to a

competitive end" (p. 84). Indeed, oriented toward lifestyle and leisure, activities such as

skydiving, rock climbing, BASE-jumping, hang gliding, surfing, skateboarding,

snowboarding, whitewater kayaking, and cliff climbing, exist within "subcultural"

worlds.

Lyng (2008) analyzed the nature of subcultures and edgework, and addressed the

important connection of identity and group dynamics related to risk. He believes the risk

inherent in many alternative sports has fueled their attraction and growing popularity.

Consequently, these sports have become "important sites for formation of individual

identity and collective experience in late modern society" (Lyng, 2008, p. 84).

Essentially, Lyng (2008) contends that edgework pursuits represent more than a response

to social conditions, they are also a process for seeking identity, camaraderie, and

emotional connection within specific communities. This idea expands on his original

concept in important ways; presenting a more detailed explanation of the intense group

solidarity among edgeworkers within subcultures, Lyng's (2008) work highlights the

extensive and powerful dimensions of the collective experience.

Importantly, Laurendeau (2008) recognized that thus far, only white, male, middle-class subjects have been examined in edgework sports, while womens' experiences are largely unknown. Laurendeau's work on gender differences highlights the fact that the "construction of risk and construction of gender are always interwoven" (2008, p. 305), and therefore, proposed a "theoretical consideration" for revising the edgework model to allow for a more nuanced insight of the motivations, experiences, and meaning for both men and women. Laurendeau's (2008) focus on "gendered risk regimes" adds to our understanding of dominant practices that shape the way that genders "do risk" (p. 301). Regardless of gender, however, participating in alternative/edgework sports is a process in which identities, individual and group relationships, and emotional intimacy are formed within specific communities (Laurendeau, 2008). Although these factors may have greater appeal for women (versus men) who pursue edgework, Laurendeau (2008) contends that more research is needed to be conclusive.

In summary, sport and edgework literature has primarily focused on: 1) the sensations, skills, and capacities of edgework pursuits, and 2) how the alternative sport experience, along with gender differences within those experiences, reveal very different, and previously unacknowledged motivations for pursuing edgework activities. The discussion of alternative sports, however, highlights the fact that edgework-sport studies have primarily focused on expensive, highly specialized pursuits. Most have significant time and cost requirements – equipment and instruction are needed, and are extremely site-specific. Many of these sports and activities are pursuable for relatively few people.

Edgework and (urban) social deviance. For those who do not have access or cannot afford highly specialized sporting pursuits, Miller (2005) believes that participating in illicit and deviant behavior may be the alternative edgework experience. Mugford and O'Malley (1994) clearly make this distinction, stating that:

> As a consequence of the inequality of resources in society, some of the ways of transcending mundane life are more open to some groups of people than to others. Skydiving, for example, may offer a transcendent experience, but it is unlikely to be available to many young black members of the urban underclass. Crack on the other hand, may provide a similarly transcending experience, but unlike skydiving is available to all, the rich and the poor. (cited in Miller, 2005, p.157)

There is little question that lower social and economic class facilitates greater alienation while limiting the types of edgework that are available (Miller, 2005). Crime, drugs, gang violence, and rape, for example, are illicit behaviors now being examined as powerful, intoxicating experiences that give alternative forms of meaning and emotional rewards (Katz, 1988). Miller (1990) notes that, similarly, the "addictive high" and rush of sensation experienced in socially deviant behavior are virtually identical to those outlined by Lyng (1990) in extreme sports.

The following section will focus on literature related to deviant behavior, forms of urban resistance and social deviance as edgework experiences, followed by a discussion of skateboarding and parkour as urban resistant sports.

Urban and social resistance. Resistant behavior and social deviance is often viewed as "deliberate nonconformity" of societal standards and associated with moral judgment; however, Galloway (2006) defines it more simply as being a "state or condition markedly different from the norm" (p. 224). In his investigation on adventure

practices as a form of deviant leisure behavior, Galloway distinguishes between the many

different types of deviance, along with the positive and negative implications on

individual and societal levels. Tolerable deviance, Galloway argues, is a range of

behavior that "does not rise to the level of societal suppression, but rather exists within

either scorn or embracement" (2006, p. 225). He notes that deviance admiration, an

underdeveloped and often overlooked concept, acts as an important motivating factor for

certain types of non-conforming or under-conforming behavior that is positively viewed

by others. Galloway (2006) further stressed that in addition to adventure recreation, other

forms of positive deviance deserve further consideration within academic research.

From Katz's (1988) perspective, crime and illicit behavior represent an emotional

process that offers unique rewards and sensations. Providing a phenomenological

analysis of criminal behavior, Katz's (1988) focus is primarily on the "seductive and

transformative aspects" of the criminal experience. Katz's criminology is situated within

the modern social context where the thrill of illicit behavior "can provide social actors

with the opportunity to escape their mundane existence… The character of modern social

life makes *excitement important to the self* [emphasis original]" (Miller, 2005, p. 312).

Similar to the edgework experience, Katz (1988) identified a particular sector of deviance

known as "sneaky thrills," which is a type of behavior motivated by the excitement of

"going against the grain" of society but falls short of being a criminal act. Moreover,

Katz makes the important yet seemingly obvious point that many types of illicit and

deviant behaviors possess a certain level of personal and social desirability. This point is

well taken; it is a crucial matter that not only underscores the present study but manifests

throughout society with powerful, far-reaching consequences (Katz, 1988).

A growing body of literature on urban resistance and edgework reveals that they

share similar philosophies and "phenomenological convergence" (Ferrell, 1995, 1996,

2001, 2005). According to Ferrell (2001), many forms of urban anarchy including

graffiti writing, Critical Mass activism, D.I.Y. movements, dis-organizations, and even

skateboarding are misperceived as angry, chaotic, and destructive behavior. After many

years of ethnographic investigations within these subcultures, however, he concluded

that:

> Both edgeworkers and anarchists share a profound passion – but not simply
> for unthinking abandon or antisocial chaos. Rather, they are junkies for
> the seductive, intoxicating tension *between* artistry and abandon, for the
> *dialetic* of chaos and control, for that "strange music" that plays when you
> stretch your luck, but stretch it just right. It's this emergent interplay that
> defines edgework and anarchism, and the potential for human actualization
> that they both offer – in fleeting moments, a sort of magic emerges: You get
> to grab hold and let go at same time. (Ferrell, 2005, p.78)

Ferrell elaborates on the similar sensual nature of participating in different forms of

social and urban deviance. The euphoric, addictive "rush of adrenalin" is a form of

intensity and excitement simply achieved by negotiating different types of boundaries.

Ferrell (2001) states that different forms of urban resistance seek to "reclaim spaces" or

"take back the streets" (p. 82). He contends that these types of activities provide

individuals with the uncertainty of an edgework experience along with powerful feelings

of freedom and empowerment that are associated with fighting social forces or subverting

social control, even if fleetingly.

Essentially, edgeworkers of all types, skydivers, BASE-jumpers, skate punks,

Critical Mass cyclists, and even traceurs, are motivated to seek a different "place of

definitions" (Ferrell, 2005). Desperate for freedom and existence outside of work,

consumption, and authority, Ferrell (2001) understands that edgeworkers and anarchists

alike set out to create "moments of human engagement'' and "do-it-yourself excitement"

that were never meant to last (p. 82). In these moments, however, edgeworkers discover

"new ways of knowing and being, and so detonate an ongoing revolution of everyday

life" (Ferrell, 2001, p. 84). Indeed, in his romanticized but still valuable contribution to

edgework and criminology research, Ferrell (2001) articulates the voice of urban

dwellers, wanderers, activists, and citizens who fight for "open" cities where they can

commune, socialize, and live more freely. While the dichotomy of freedom and

constraint is central to his work, Ferrell (2001, 2005) more importantly addresses

confinement and control within the urban environment and the many innovative and

persistent ways people resist it.

However, discerning physical and psychological confinement and the motives

underlying urban anarchy and resistance are contingent upon recognizing the city as a

"built environment heavily influenced with architectures of control" (Shahani, 2008, p.

3). Increasingly, preventive and psychological "disciplinary" architecture, surveillance

cameras and security presence are being used within urban space (Ferrell, 2001). Kolko

(2007) points out that the increased pressure for city planners to reduce the potential for

social problems has created a new type of architect called "interaction designers," whose

entire function is to understand human psychology related to the manipulation of conduct

within social and spatial dynamics. While these "designs with intent" are meant to control, discipline and discriminate within public spaces, they are rarely obvious. Much of this contemporary urban architecture works on deeper, subconscious levels yet influences behavior in increasingly powerful ways (Shahani, 2008).

Problematically, the passive reception of these disciplinary measures does not come without a price. This disparagement, an understood and palpable impingement on freedoms, Shahani (2008) notes, is what inspires those "dissatisfied with the confines of these designs to organize and create movements to combat them" (p. 5). These types of movements, however unorganized, constitute Ferrell's idea of an "ongoing revolution." They also describe certain sport and physical activities that contest socio-spatial control by using the urban environment in ways that are resistant and disruptive. The following section reviews the literature related to different sports that act as forms of urban and social resistance.

Urban and social resistance – and sport. Beal's (1995) exploration of skateboarding and social resistance used hegemony theory to frame how skaters "challenge dominant practices, create alternative practices, and potentially create social change through cultural practices" (p. 265). Beal found that the most blatant challenge to dominant ideologies was skaters' overwhelming opposition to "corporate bureaucratic" forms of sport. Hence, skaters also rejected the idea of competition as a core value, along with contradictions about authenticity, commercialization, sponsorship, and the "trendiness" of skateboarding.

What is clear from Beal's research is that fighting social forces with resistant behavior manifests in different forms, to varying degrees: certain skaters' idea of resistance (rejecting mainstream, adult-run sports) is decidedly different than others' (fighting to liberate public space from increasing regulation), as found in Ferrell's (2001) work. Nevertheless, Beal (1995) notes, while skaters were not directly transformed by their socially resistant practices, they were empowered by their decision to act in their best interest by creating and sustaining different types of alternative activities. Beal (1995) therefore suggests that while skateboarding acts as both micro and macro forms of social resistance, it was skaters' ability to use a physical activity as a means of "reclaiming power", that is, power related to autonomy and the politics of the self, that was most significant.

Focusing on urban deviance, Irvine and Taysom (1998) describe how skateboarding disrupts the consumptive logic of city space by "reinventing the terrain of the city" (p. 23). As the city organizes people in respect to consumer patterns and market logic, skaters, who view the urban landscape as a free, open, public space – using handrails and benches to perform tricks – confuse and disrupt that logic (Irvine & Taysom, 1998). Still, while skaters in commercial districts can be ticketed, have their boards taken, or thrown in jail for repeat offenses, their defiance of being criminalized and confined to city-sanctioned skate parks is vehement. In fact, for many urban resistant skaters, skate parks "kill the heart of skateboarding" (Ferrell, 2001, p.75), essentially, because it reinforces the very dynamics of social control that restrict them and further proscribes where they can and cannot skate.

Stratford's (2002) research on urban governance and the "problem" of skating addresses the tension and "unavoidable clashes between 'unproductive' skaters and 'productive' commercial interests and citizen-consumers" (p. 195). Increasingly, urban managers have the difficult and complex demands of accommodating skaters (as moral citizens) while controlling them in (legal) public spaces (Stratford, 2002). One skater articulates the putative attitude of many, demonstrating why this task is so difficult:

> You see the shirts and the stickers everywhere and people yelling all the time, "Skateboarding is not a crime." Yes it is. You know, we don't need your sympathy. We don't care; we never have, never will. You can throw up all the signs you want. You can take us to jail; we'll get out. You can put up a fence, we'll find a way over it. (Ferrell, 2001, p.76)

While the boundaries continue to be drawn and redrawn for sanctioned and regulated space for skateboarding, the reconceptualization of power relations occurs when the conventional uses of urban space are disrupted (Irvine & Taysom, 1998). Indeed, as skaters continue to skate defiantly and unsettle formal regulation, they continue to challenge our understanding of the spatial relations of the city.

Thomson (2008) presents parkour as an equally disruptive practice to the "capital city" and consumption. He states that "parkour is not so much a manifesto as an instance of the unruly intersection between capital flow and the flow of human bodies; instead of coinciding, they may intersect at angles of varying and appositional intensities" (p. 251). Thomson (2008) infers that while parkour is lacking in "particular politics of dissent," it is deviant in nature nonetheless. But unlike skateboarding, Thomson adds "that its roots lies in the imaginary space of outrunning Vietcong soldiers in Indochina should give pause to anyone who wishes to link the movement in any simple fashion with protests

against capital" (2008, p. 254). Parkour may represent an unusual and ulterior form of urban resistance.

Foucan (2008) defines freerunning as "an art that allows people to grow physically and spiritually according to their own paths, not society's" (p. 9). Similarly, Urban Freeflow gives much attention to individual empowerment, focusing on self-knowledge, awareness, Eastern philosophies, and skill acquisition. Parkour and freerunning, seemingly intent on being the "good face" of urban movement – consciously distancing itself from the anti-authoritarianism and outright defiance of skateboarding – would rather be seen as a "movement about movement" (Thomson, 2008).

Notwithstanding, parkour's philosophical dictums that encourage traceurs to "reimagine the city as a playground" and turn "obstacles into opportunity" rely on the very same enterprising and disruptive appropriation of public space as skateboarding and BASE-jumping. The more contestable point remains, however, whether causing disorder and upsetting pedestrian and/or consumer flow is intentional or an unfortunate by-product of the practice. Despite the fact that Urban Freeflow advocates respect for security guards, citizens, the environment, and other traceurs, it is possible that part of the "art" of parkour is the art of elusive subterfuge. Intentionality may importantly, and appropriately, differentiate parkour from other resistant sports.

Bavinton's (2007) exploration of parkour focused on the key philosophy of turning "obstacles into opportunities". He found that the traceurs' ability to reinterpret space and use it in unconventional ways upsets embedded power relations within urban settings. Drawing on a post-structural leisure perspective, Bavinton (2007) suggests that

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parkour is a form of resistance that alters the subjective relationship between a traceur and the city environment. Bavinton's (2007) analysis of media articles, website material, and participants' interviews provided a means for a rich discussion about the power of transforming one's perspective. Significantly, Bavinton found that the cognitive shift of seeing obstacles as opportunity and "constraints as a challenge" gave traceurs a newfound sense of freedom and possibility.

Additionally, Bavinton's (2007) study revealed traceurs' awareness of the resistant or deviant nature of their unconventional use of urban spaces. He quotes a traceur reflecting that:

> Urban environments are designed for one of many uses, with these uses either the aim to restrict, direct, and slow movement. I try to practice in areas that restrict and slow me as much as possible.. it appeals to my sense of defiance against all those who designed the environment to restrict and control. (p. 406)

Bavinton shows how traceurs' complex negotiation of the physical and social constraints of practicing parkour contributed to their sense of agency as individuals. Importantly though, while leisure constraints are typically characterized as impeding participation, parkour is a practice that seeks out constraints in an effort to negotiate and overcome them.

Qualitative research in sport. Numerous scholars have advocated the use of qualitative inquiry in sport psychology research (Dale, 1996; Gill, 1992; Krane, Anderson, & Strean, 1997; Locke, 1989; Strean, 1998). This study will use qualitative methods to examine the lived experiences of traceurs, focusing on the meanings, feelings, and sensations associated with parkour and freerunning. As Dale (1996) suggests,

qualitative research has become a more accepted and valued method of inquiry within the

field. In recent years, numerous qualitative studies have focused on specific phenomena

within sport, using in-depth interviews as means of investigating the experiences and

perceptions of athletes (Butryn, 2003; Dale, 2000; Jackson, 1996; Schneider, Butryn,

Furst, & Masucci, 2007; Strean, 1998; Veri, 1998). Kerry and Amour (2000) cite Bain's

(1995) comments on the value of subjective knowledge in the sporting experience:

> Qualitative research provides insight into another's personal reality.
> A qualitative research report provides the reader not with generaliza-
> tions, but tools for reflection. The knowledge produced is not a
> generalizable law of behavior, but is new subjective knowledge con-
> structed by the reader. The reader uses this new insight to create new
> meanings and actions in his or her own life. Is this knowledge valuable?
> Can it have an impact on other settings? I think the answer is yes.
> (p. 244)

Subjective knowledge constructed from an existential perspective, in particular, can

provide insights into how human thinking, feeling and being is experienced (i.e., during

sport and physical activity) and becomes a meaningful aspect of life (Langford, 2002).

The following engagement with the literature will review existential phenomenology and

existential phenomenology within sport studies.

Existential phenomenology. As noted previously, existential phenomenology is

based on two intertwining philosophies, that of existentialism and phenomenology

(Carmen, 2008). Existentialism, von Eckartsberg (1998) argues, is characterized as an

effort to define the broad, essential, and "perennial" themes of human existence. For

Heidegger (1889-1976), existence is described and understood as *being-in-the-world*, and

the meaning (and meaninglessness) attached to that "condition." Being-in-the-world

encompasses more than human consciousness, it constitutes "the total human response to

a perceived situation," or the "human situated experience" (von Eckartsberg, 1998, p.10).

Existentialism thus is the study of one's situation within the world, focusing on our

humanness, our uniqueness as individuals, and the meaning of being a living, breathing

embodied life.

Phenomenology, on the other hand, is a research method based on systematic

reflection that seeks to *describe* the actual experience of life and living, and the specific

sensual and emotional states of particular life experiences (von Eckartsberg, 1998). It

was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) as a way of studying and understanding

human meaning primarily through one's consciousness. However, Merleau-Ponty (1962)

believed that in addition to consciousness, the body is inextricably linked to our

experience and perception of the world. In other words, we experience the world through

our bodies. His idea of phenomenology is based on *intentionality* – the "of-ness or

aboutness" of experience, the directedness of the mind toward the world, or the

"relational dynamic of self–world interaction" (p. 74). Additionally, Merleau-Ponty's

account of perception as neither subjective nor objective, but rather as an aspect of being-

in-the-world, further explicates his view of phenomenology as emphasizing the "essential

bodily intertwining of perception and the perceived world" (Carmen, 2008, p.75).

Existential-phenomenology, therefore, examines existence in terms of a person's

situated involvement within the world (von Eckartsberg, 1998). It is the tension and

interdependence between lived life and thought that forms the basis of existential

phenomenology as a philosophy – the experience of life, and the natural inclination to

reflect about what that experience means (von Eckartsberg, 1998). Essentially, for

applied psychological research, phenomenology provides existentialism with the method needed to effectively describe human experience and existence (Dale, 1996).

Existential phenomenology in sport. While the last two decades have seen significant growth in research and writing on embodiment and sociology of the body within sport, much of the work has been on an abstract and theoretical level (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). Further, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) point out that few studies have focused on the "fleshy," "carnal realities" and sensuous dimensions of the sporting body (Ahmed, 2004; Ford & Brown, 2005; Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007; Wainwright & Turner, 2003). The researchers thus provide guidelines and intellectual resources for developing a phenomenological approach to analyzing the sporting body, including various textual forms that may be used to accentuate its portrayal.

Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) further point to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) philosophy of embodied consciousness and the body being-in-the-world as offering a rich possibility of capturing a particular kind of sporting experience. While sociological research using rich sensory experiences is not lacking (e.g., as found in autoethnographic or autonarrative approaches), the authors note that the few phenomenological texts that have focused entirely on the sensual dimensions in sport have been valuable and insightful contributions (Downey, 2005; Wacquant, 2004). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) highlight each of the sensory dimensions, along with movement and rhythm, as potential areas of exploration for researchers. Additionally, the researchers review data gathering and representation in phenomenological portrayals, which helps provide an evocative and embodied depiction of the experience being investigated.

Kerry and Amour (2000) suggest to researchers using the phenomenological approach that, "the purpose of writing is to bring the essences of the lived experience into being" (p. 9). Providing an overview of phenomenology, the authors offer instruction for exploring and presenting subjective knowledge with a greater degree of consistency in sports studies research. Phenomenological insight has the potential to provide more than "rich description"; in particular cases it may also have direct impact on certain sporting practices. Despite increased attention, however, Kerry and Amour (2000) find few studies that fully merit "the phenomenological descriptor" (Dale, 2000; Pronger, 1990; Rail, 1992; Smith, 1992; Wessinger, 1994). They suggest that within phenomenological research, philosophical backgrounds must be made explicit, and that recognizing those differences will influence methodological decisions. In this way, "the goal of insight, which is central to the phenomenological task, can be achieved" (Kerry & Armour, 2000, p. 14). Following Kerry and Armour (2000), the present study draws on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) contributions to existential phenomenology, which focuses on intentionality, perception, and the body as the basis of how we engage with and experience the world.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore traceurs' lived, embodied experiences of risk in parkour using existential phenomenological research methods. This chapter outlines the process and criteria used to select the participants, the phenomenological interview procedures that were used for data collection, and the data analysis procedures. In addition, this chapter discusses the ways that academic validity was established.

Participants. The participants in this study included 11 traceurs/traceuses (9 males, 2 females) between the ages of 18 and 33 years old. Participants recruited for this study were intermediate-to-advanced level traceurs, with a minimum of three years of experience. The traceurs that participated trained for and practiced parkour on a regular basis and were highly identified with the sport. Phenomenological research is dependent on reflective, full and sensitive descriptions of an experience; thus more experienced practitioners were chosen. Because men and women experience risk-taking differently (Lois, 2005), this study used both male and female participants for a more diverse set of reflections on the subject. Indeed, Laurendeau's (2008) work on gender differences highlights the fact that the "construction of risk and construction of gender are always interwoven" (p. 305).

The goal of this research was to describe the nature of the embodied experience of parkour from a wide-ranging variation in description. Shertock (1998) suggests the nature or structure of experience is derived from "a combination of empirical descriptions and additional descriptions generated from imaginative thought experiments" (p.162). Because phenomenological research requires rich, evocative descriptions of an experience, participants were chosen specifically for their potential to provide this type of data (Dale, 2000). Similar to purposeful sampling, the phenomenological researcher chose "a variety of participants who have had different experiences of the same phenomenon" (Dale, 2000, p. 21).

Procedures. The researcher recruited participants in the San Francisco Greater Bay Area, California, via email. Email addresses were obtained through the San

Francisco parkour website (sfparkour.com) "bio" pages. After initial email contact, the researcher conducted brief telephone pre-interviews before participants were selected to ensure their "fit" for this type of study.

A good participant fit is one in which the participant understands the type of research being conducted, has the required experience, and is willing and able to provide personal and introspective insight into the phenomenon being studied (Colaizzi, 1978). It requires that the participant is willing to share private, unexamined thoughts and emotions and be able to articulate the meaningful and significant ways that practicing parkour shapes his or her life. However, van Kaam (1966) believed that participants' capacity to provide quality data required more skills. He proposed that beyond having experience and articulateness, participants should have the basic attributes of (1) "feeling able to express themselves in verbal form, (2) feeling able to express inner feelings without excessive inhibition, (3) being able to sense and express the experiences that accompany these feelings, and (4) feeling a spontaneous interest in the experience" (as cited in Shertock, 1998, p.162).

After participants were identified, the researcher sent out preliminary instructions to each, conveying the precise nature of the study and the procedures involved. This letter served as a research summary guide that helped fully prepare the participant for the subject matter, research process, and structure of the interview (Moustakas, 1994). Further, participants were informed that all identifying data would be removed and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were actively

encouraged to view this research project as a collaboration of efforts (Moustakas, 1994) in seeking knowledge and insight into the phenomenology of parkour.

Prior to the interviewing process, the researcher participated in an in-depth bracketing interview and a pilot interview. The bracketing interview, developed from Husserl's methodology of "phenomenological reduction" or "epoche" helps bring researchers' assumptions and biases about the subject into awareness (Shertock, 1998). It is only after suspending or bracketing preconceptions, von Eckartsberg (1998) points out, that the natural attitude of the researcher gives way to a more disciplined "phenomenological attitude" from which he or she can grasp the "essential structures" of the phenomenon as they appear (p. 6). The assumption thus implies that the bracketing interview facilitates researchers' ability to describe the subject not in terms of what is presumed or known, but rather exactly as it presents itself within one's consciousness (von Eckartsberg, 1998). The bracketing process is essentially a form of researchers' "radical self-examination" prior to data collection that Coliazzi (1978) calls individual phenomenological reflection (IPR).

For the present study, the bracketing interview was conducted by a colleague with expertise in qualitative research. Biases included pre-conceived ideas or judgments about edgework or risk sport in general, or philosophies, beliefs, or meanings held by traceurs or traceuses regarding parkour. According to Dale (2000), the researcher must acknowledge that "presuppositions" exist, and account for them throughout the investigative process. From a pragmatic standpoint, the bracketing interview helped the researcher understand and experience the process of being interviewed (Dale, 1996,

2000). In general, the researcher incorporated a significant amount of self-reflective knowledge throughout the research process and was cognizant of ideas regarding "predetermined themes" or categories before data collection began (Coté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). Additionally, the researcher was familiar with names of the various popular techniques (e.g., 270 cat, 360 wallhop, diving kong, crane, tic tac, underbar etc.) and other jargon used in parkour and freerunning.

Next, a pilot interview was conducted. This allowed the researcher to practice managing lengthy interview sessions, but more importantly, it helped ensure that the study's interview procedures were effective and reliable. One participant was chosen from the sample pool of participants to take part in the pilot interview. Phenomenological interview techniques and procedures were followed precisely as described below.

Interview protocol. Following university mandated human subject approval and upon signing consent forms, safeguarding the confidentiality of the participant responses, interviews were conducted in a neutral, quiet, distraction-free setting that was convenient for the participant. Before beginning, participants were asked to fill out a personal background information form.

Before the interview began, the researcher created an atmosphere or climate that helped the participant feel comfortable, relaxed and unselfconscious (Moustakas, 1994). The participant was reminded of the structure of a phenomenological interview, and asked to give complete, detailed, and full descriptions of experiences and emotions that were being reflected upon. The researcher set a slow and relaxed pace, and asked the participant to take as long as he or she wished to complete thoughts and descriptions.

Pauses, silence and moments of reflection are normal and are encouraged during the phenomenological interview (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the researcher reminded the participant to focus most on the experience rather than the situation or interpretation of the experience (von Eckartsberg, 1998).

The phenomenological interviews for this investigation were audiotaped with a digital voice recorder and lasted between 60 and 140 minutes.

Phenomenological interviewing techniques. The researcher employed phenomenological interviewing techniques as described by Dale (1996, 2000). This technique uses open and unstructured interviews, letting the participant talk at length about his or her experiences with occasional guidance or probing from the researcher (Dale, 2000). The unstructured interview is a type of in-depth, open-ended dialog that allows contemplation and moments of realization. Allowing the participant to become the "expert" while reflecting on meanings, sensations and feeling may yield the richer, more vital type descriptors that are necessary for phenomenological research (Dale, 2000). Furthermore, the researcher approached the phenomenological interview with a spirit of collaboration (Shertock, 1998). As such, the researcher inhabited an empathetic, receptive presence while subtly yet actively shaping the course of the interview.

Importantly, researchers' "mode of presence" during the phenomenological interview is crucial in facilitating participants' emotional openness to meaningful exploration (Churchill, 1998). A skilled phenomenological researcher, therefore, possesses and reflects empathy, or "empathetic perception" during interviews to fully grasp participants' embodied expression (Churchill, 1998). Gordon (1969) described

empathy as "the process by which one person is able to imaginatively place himself in another's role and situation in order to understand the other's feeling, point of view, attitudes, and tendencies to act in a given situation" (p. 18).

One of the first and most critical steps of the interviewing process, according to Dale (1996), is establishing rapport between researcher and participant. Efforts were made to achieve a connection with each participant during pre-interview discussions, conversing before the interview, and at any time contact was made to establish trust, connection, and a non-judgmental attitude. During the interviews, the researcher adopted the following stance suggested by Wertz (1984) as cited in Shertock (1998, p.163) for conducting phenomenological interviews:

1. Empathetic presence to the described situation.

2. Slowing down and patiently dwelling with the participant on the details of
   descriptions.

3. Encouraging magnification, amplification of the details.

4. Suspending disbelief and employing intense interest.

Facilitating the process, the researcher used prior educational experience in conducting psychoanalytical therapy sessions to guide participants during the interview. Indeed, Dale (1996) notes that the in-depth phenomenological interview is similar to the athlete-sport psychologist interaction during a mental training session or intervention.

The phenomenological interview often begins with brief social conversation or even a meditative activity (Moustakas, 1994). Following this opening, the researcher asked the participant to take a few moments to focus on the experience of doing parkour

or freerunning, moments of particular awareness and impact, and the many details of the experience. After a few minutes, the researcher asked the participant to: "Please describe the overall experience of parkour or freerunning, focusing on the sensations, emotions, thoughts and meanings that are significant to you, as well as how the element of risk is 'felt' within these experiences."

Participants were reminded that risk may be felt as a physical, mental, social or emotional sensation. In case a participant needs more guidance or has not been able to tap into the experience qualitatively or without sufficient depth and description, Moustakas, (1994) suggests having a broad interview guide prepared to facilitate dialog. The types of questions that Moustakas (1994, p. 116) suggests are:

1. How have these experiences affected you?

2. What was that like?

3. What thoughts stood out for you?

4. Can you tell me more about…?

5. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

6. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

Similar questions were used for the phenomenological interview guide for the current study along with specific questions relating to experiences of risk.

Data analysis. Following the data collection, interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data analysis for this study was a five-step process utilizing two well-established procedures, including Dale's (2000) phenomenological method, and the thematic analysis process demonstrated by Coté, Salmela, Baria & Russell, (1993). First,

the entire transcript was read several times to get a sense of the meaning and experience as a whole (Dale, 1996, 2000). Second, as an additional step recommended by Sparkes (1998), ongoing peer reviews conducted by a sport studies professional (with expertise in qualitative and phenomenological methods) helped establish objectivity throughout the data analysis phase. During the initial meetings, the researcher discussed interpretations of the transcripts (i.e., perceived meanings of certain phrases or statements regarding inflection and emotion). This process established "emerging meanings" or raw data themes (Dale, 2000) from large, loosely bound categories of text (Coté et al., 1993). Third, after overlapping and repetitive statements were removed, emerging meanings or "meaning units" were coded or tagged (Coté et al., 1993). Tagging is a process that removes pertinent portions of data from their original context and then organizes and categorizes them. Following Coté et al. (1993), in subsequent peer reviews, the researchers discussed and agreed upon (thematic) terms that best described that particular data in order to prevent potential bias. Fourth, these tagged categories were then studied and clustered into higher order themes. Finally, the higher order themes were organized into meaningful dimensions (Dale 1996).

Establishing academic validity. Sparkes (1998) addresses the importance of creating new criteria for establishing academic rigor in qualitative research. In the current study, the researcher used four important procedures to establish validity. First, the results and discussion sections of this investigation have been presented in expressive, rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the phenomenon using the participant's voice. Dale (1996) states that within phenomenological research, a first person, evocative

description of the phenomenon is a key criterion in judging a study's validity. Kerry and Amour (2000) elaborate: "In phenomenological reduction, the task is that of describing, in textual language, what is seen and how it is experienced, the fundamental relationship between phenomenon and self" (p. 5). Therefore, if this type of description is lacking, the study will lack validity, or appropriate rigor (Dale, 2000).

Second, in addition to closely following phenomenological methods (Dale, 2000), the researcher chose a specific strand of phenomenology to guide this investigation (Allen-Collinson, 2009). A Merleau-Pontian (1962) perspective was used to view, analyze, and describe the experience of traceurs. Further, the structure of this experience was provided, which, according to Allen-Collinson (2009) is an important aspect of phenomenological research. Lastly, she notes that the phenomenological method must "fit" the experience being investigated (2009). Merleau-Ponty's (1962) form of existential phenomenology, with its focus upon embodiment and being-in-the-world, was particularly well-suited for the in-depth portrayal of traceurs and the practice of parkour and freerunning.

Third, the researcher participated in ongoing peer reviews (mentioned previously), which contributed to interpretive accuracy, objectivity, and validity within the data analysis process (Sparkes, 1998). During these meetings, the researcher was questioned extensively about decisions and rationale regarding various aspects of the study.

Finally, after the data analysis phase, a member check was used as a final validation technique (Bloor, 1997). The member check is a verification method that

involves sending each participant a copy of the manuscript and asking for feedback on whether the description of his or her experience was expressed accurately and without embellishment (Bloor, 1997). According to Fielding and Fielding (1986), this process should be treated "as yet another source of data and insight" (p. 43). Each participant individually member-checked his or her transcript; six participants gave feedback and/or clarification. That information was then studied, recorded in a written case report, and incorporated into the final draft of this project (Dale, 2000).

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