

“AND THEN, I WAS PART OF A GROUP AND I COULD PARTICIPATE IN ALL DECISIONS!”: GYMNASTICS FOR ALL EXPERIENCES

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Background and purpose: Events are widely studied and one of the themes that researchers are particularly interested in is the participants' experiences, specifically, the feeling of community, individual and social identity (GETZ, 2010). These perceptions are common in sports events in which groups participate representing some entity or nationality (WITCHMAN, 2015). Participating in events reveal feelings of group identity, and the daily life of a group can develop a sense of collectivity. In this approach, Menegaldo (2016) indicates that Gymnastics for All (GfA) – an essentially non- competitive discipline of gymnastics, recognized by the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) -- can be a practice with the potential to develop the sense of collectivity. The absence of rules and patterns; the lack of restrictions based on age, ability, gender or ethnicity; and the objective of developing friendship and fitness through a fun environment may foster consolidation of group identity. Thus, this research investigates adults' perceptions of being part of a GfA group and of participating in GfA events. **Methods:** This study is based on qualitative research. Data collection included systematic participant observations of an adult group (aged 18 to 30 years old) during two different GfA Festivals (International and Local Events) as well as a Focus Group at the end of the season of GfA practice. The interview started with a video of the subjects' choreographic composition in GfA and a several pictures to "break the ice," followed by the question, "Can you tell us about your group?" The answers were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was inductive and ongoing using constant comparison methods. **Results:** Three themes emerged: a. Becoming community - the participants incorporated the commitments of the group into their personal routines; they organized their families' schedules to accommodate group responsibilities; and they understood the importance



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of being present at all training sessions; b. Overcoming and transcendence - challenging new practices during the meetings and the creation of the choreography allowed the subjects to experience new movements and relationships; c. Being pro-active – the participants were able to make decisions about training sessions, gymnastic movements, music and costumes. For example, they offered ideas about how they would do the warm-ups; they brought traditional and non-traditional apparatus to the gym and helped to make each class a novelty; they exchanged significant stories about their lives and planned extra group activities like breakfasts and barbecues, demonstrating great camaraderie among them. **Conclusion and applications:** Debates about groups' identities in different communities become intense and systematic in the academic world, especially in events (GETZ, 2010; MERKEL, 2015). The goal of performing in a GfA event as part of a team in a choreographic composition strengthened their commitment to the GfA classes and to the group as a whole. Being part of a group and representing a country, city or club has the potential of involving practitioners in a physical activity for a long period of time. Physical educators and coaches must be aware of that possibility, as they can offer lifelong sports practice for a wide range of people.

Keywords: Sport Events; Gymnastic for All; Experience; Gymnastics Group.