

Transitioning through injury: A Phenomenological Approach for Ultra-Runners

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Acknowledgments

“A PhD is a marathon not a sprint” A colleague eagerly uttered this phrase to me several years ago when I began this journey. I can now say I disagree. With all of the highs and lows, twists and turns I feel like I have just reached the finish line of an ultra-marathon. This project has changed me in ways I never thought possible. It has expanded my critical thinking, caused me to ask more questions, and lit a fire of passion for research and exploring new and innovative methods of knowledge production.

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Finally, to the eight incredible people I had the opportunity to interview during this project. For sharing your vulnerability with me, and trusting me to share your experiences in a way that portrays your humanity with dignity and respect. I am inspired by all of you.

Certification of originality

This thesis is the result of original research and no part of this work has been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

I certify that this thesis has been written by me. An assistance I have received in my research and the preparation of this thesis has been acknowledged.

Leanne Hall

15th December 2023

Authors contributions

The research in this thesis has been carried out by the author under the supervision of Professor Paul Rhodes, School of Psychology, University of Sydney.

The author planned the research, collected, analysed and interpreted the data, drafted and revised the manuscripts for submission to peer reviewed journals, and wrote and compiled this thesis.

Assistance for each chapter is acknowledged below:

- Chapters 1 and 5: Prof Paul Rhodes assisted in critically reviewing the drafts of these chapters.
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Confirmation of authorship contributions

As supervisor for the candidature upon which this thesis is based. I can confirm that the authorship attribution statements above are correct.

Paul Rhodes

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Certification of originality	iii
Author's contributions	iii
Table of contents	v
Index of Tables and Figures	vii
Index of appendices	viii
Publications arising from this thesis	ix
Abstract	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Chapter overview	1
1.2 The body in sport	1
1.3 Running bodies	2
1.4 Socio-cultural influences on running	4
1.5 The rise of ultra-running	5
1.6 Ultra-runners subjective experiences of discomfort and pain	6
1.7 The injured ultra-running body	8
1.8 Thesis overview and aims	9
1.9 References	14
Chapter 2: Ultra-running: Repositioning the injury experience within an embodied framework	
2.1 Chapter overview	17
2.2 Abstract	18
2.3 Embodied running	18
2.4 Injury through a dualistic discourse	19
2.5 Injury as embodied disruption	22
2.6 The subculture of ultra-running	24
2.7 Chaos and transformation	26
2.8 Multiplicity of discourses	28
2.9 Conclusions	30
2.10 References	32
Chapter 3: Embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners: A qualitative meta-synthesis	
3.1 Chapter overview	36
3.2 Abstract	37
3.3 Introduction	37

3.4 Method	41
3.5 Results	46
3.6 Conclusion	54
3.7 References	61
Chapter 4: The embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners: A	
Body mapping study	
4.1 Chapter overview	65
4.2 Abstract	65
4.3 Introduction	66
4.4 Methods	71
4.5 Analysis	74
4.6 Results	77
4.7 Discussion	94
4.8 References	99
Chapter 5: General Discussion	
5.1 Chapter overview	104
5.2 Summary of findings	104
5.3 Theoretical and practical implications	105
5.4 Arts based research methods and embodied healing	107
5.5 Resisting neutrality: On being an insider researcher	109
5.6 Ethical considerations	110
5.7 Future directions	113
5.8 Concluding remarks	113
5.9 References	115
Appendices	117

Index of Tables

Table 3.1: Included studies	43
Table 3.2: Second order themes	45
Table 4.1: Ultra-runners Characteristics	71

Index of Figures

Figure 3.1: PRISMA flow chart	42
Figure 4.1: Body map excerpt	78
Figure 4.2: Body map excerpt	79
Figure 4.3: Body map excerpt	81
Figure 4.4: Body map excerpt	82
Figure 4.5: Body map excerpt	83
Figure 4.6: Body map excerpt	83
Figure 4.7: Body map excerpt	84
Figure 4.8: Body map excerpt	85
Figure 4.9: Body map excerpt	85
Figure 4.10: Body map excerpt	87
Figure 4.11: Body map excerpt	89
Figure 4.12: Body map excerpt	90
Figure 4.13: Body map excerpt	90
Figure 4.14: Body map excerpt	92

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics approval confirmation letter	117
Appendix B: James Body Map	119
Appendix C: Craig Body Map	120
Appendix D: Naomi Body Map (a, b)	121
Appendix E: Lisa Body Map	123
Appendix F: Chantel Body Map	124
Appendix G: Kelly Body Map	125
Appendix H: Lauren Body Map	126
Appendix I: Rick Body Map	127
Appendix J: Copy of published chapter, <i>More than Mechanics: Injury, Running and Healing</i> in Rhodes, P (ed) (2020). <i>Beyond the Psychology Industry</i> .	128

List of publications arising from this thesis

This thesis is presented for examination as a ‘thesis with publications’.

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Abstract

Ultra-running is an endurance sport requiring athletes to run in events exceeding the marathon distance of 42.2km. Event distances range from 50km to 100km or 100 miles, some even extending for hundreds of kilometres over many days. Events are typically held on mountain trails, covering various terrain often at high altitudes. While pain and injury for these athletes is quite common and well documented, less is known about their subjective experiences. As a sport which has witnessed exponential growth over recent decades, athletes' experiences are influenced by a number of discourses. The situatedness of their experiences, especially in relation to injury has been touched on in the research from a phenomenological perspective. However, research about their lived and living corporeal experience, where the body is at the centre, is sparse. The aim of this thesis was to understand and explore the embodied lived and living experiences of ultra-runners who had experienced injury, providing unique insights and knowledge about the intersection between corporeal subjectivity and the various discourses that these athletes resist and submit to. Existing literature about how ultra-runners bodies are discursively produced was synthesised and (re)positioned around an embodiment framework, providing a unique theory of injury embodiment for ultra-runners (Chapter 2). A qualitative meta synthesis was then conducted, involving a hermeneutic analysis of ten interview studies using meta-ethnography. Ultra-runners experiences of injury were reorganised around an embodiment framework resulting in five taxonomies representing the embodied ways these athletes resist and submit to various discourses when experiencing pain and injury (Chapter 3). Finally, eight in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, along with eight detailed body maps co-created with ultra-runners who had recently been injured. Plot lines were woven through the visual and textual material, capturing stories of body-self transformation, the body-as-machine and the ageing body (Chapter 4). While the theory paper and meta-synthesis highlighted the gaps in existing research and literature about the *embodied* experiences of injured ultra-runners, these papers provide both the context and foundations for the study documented in Chapter 4. In this study, two sets of empirical data were captured and analysed together to represent embodied experience and a resistance to positivist and dualistic epistemologies. Findings demonstrated the limitations of narrative inquiry in providing access to embodied experience, and the benefits of using arts-based methods of inquiry to enable a deeper and richer exploration of multi-layered embodied experience. The research in this thesis has not only repositioned the injury experiences of ultra-runners into an embodiment framework, but has demonstrated how unique arts based methods of qualitative inquiry can provide a deeper understanding of the lived and living experiences of ultra-runners. It highlights the importance of selecting research methodologies that are aligned with the theoretical and ontological assumptions and research aims.

Finally, the findings in this thesis provide an important contribution to the existing research by deepening our understanding of how injury has the potential to unlock past pain and traumas for

athletes. This has significant implications for how ultra-runners and endurance athletes more generally respond to and heal from pain and injury. Further research is needed to expand these findings, and explore the experiences of a more diverse population of athletes.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

The following chapter begins with a review of the existing literature about the body in sport, providing context for a discussion and summary about how ultra-runners bodies are discursively constructed within a post-modern and social constructionist perspective. I then provide relevant historical context to the sport of ultra-running, leading to the recent exponential growth of the sport and justification for the research presented in this thesis. I then present embodiment as a framework for understanding the corporeal experiences of injury for these athletes, to expand our knowledge about how the injured body is situated within the broader discourses of medicine and ableism, and to identify potential opportunities for these athletes to resist the disciplinary forces that create and maintain ultra-running bodies. I explain how the injured body is currently positioned within the ultra-running research and relate this to the dominance of positivist research methodologies. I then present an alternative method of knowledge production. One that centres the lived and living experience of the ultra-running body and holds space for co-produced multi-layered meaning making. Finally, I summarise the aims and findings of the three published studies that are contained in the individual chapters presented in this thesis before introducing how the methodologies and forms of data analysis were selected in this project.

1.2 The Body in Sport

Early conceptualizations of the sporting body are largely theoretical, bracketing out the individual and assigning mind priority over the body, severing it from its embodied form (Freund, 1988; Wainwright & Turner, 2006). Positioned as an object and vehicle through which discourses about strength and endurance can be witnessed, the focus of these early theoretical approaches is on what is *done* to the body as opposed to the corporeal experiences of the athlete (Crossley, 1995). Recognising the situatedness of the body, post-structuralists such as Bourdieu and Foucault have provided important theoretical tools to explore the social construction of the sporting body, allowing exploration of the body in an embodied sense. As one of the first sociological commentaries of the body in sport, Bourdieu's theory locates the body as a reflection of social values and a bearer of physical capital (Bourdieu, 1978). According to Bourdieu sport cannot be seen in isolation from cultural practices and social influences. Foucault extends this theory by positioning the body as a material site of disciplinary and discursive practices acted on by sport as a technology of domination (Foucault, 1979). According to Foucault, not only is the sporting body firmly situated within culture and society, it is disciplined by the forces and technologies relating to sport. While initially referring to the

negative and subjugating forces of power, in his later work Foucault referred to the positive aspects of power, technologies of the self and the productive aspects of the powerful body escaping repression (Foucault, 1988). In these later references Foucault alludes to the idea of emancipation, where otherwise ‘docile bodies’ choose to resist these powerful influences. These theories, whilst comprehensive in their positioning of the body within socio-cultural influences and forces, remain largely disembodied, lacking in corporeality and the experiences of both *having* a body and *being* a body. Theberge (1991), recognised that in establishing the social significance of the body in sport, the meaning and experience of the body has been lost.

The lived and living body in a corporeal sense within sport was first explored in the early 2000’s by researchers such as Hockey & Allen Collinson (2007) in their phenomenological account of the body in sport. Their work sits alongside other accounts of how various discourses influence embodied experience within sport. For example, feminist accounts of the gendered sporting body (Allen Collinson, 2011; Markula, 2003/2005; Hanold, 2010). Reinforcement of racial hierarchies through the discursive boundaries framing the black subject (Carrington, 2001), and the ageing and maturing body in sport (Wainwright & Turner, 2006).

1.3 Running Bodies

Moving beyond previously held discursive notions of the body-as-machine in sport (see Howe, 2004; Hoberman, 1992 as examples), social constructionist perspectives of the running body have drawn on Foucauldian theories referring to running as a technology to discipline bodies, creating the ‘docile’ body (Hanold, 2010; Denison & Mills, 2014). Practices and techniques such as running according to Foucault are used to regulate and control the body in order to turn individuals into productive and conforming members of society (Foucault, 1995). These perspectives suggest that the disciplinary practices associated with running objectifies bodies, producing the normative running body which is considered to be lean, athletic and muscular (Hockey, 2005; Hanold, 2010). How the normative running body functions alongside the ideal feminine body for female runners has also been a topic of research (Allen Collinson, 2011; Hanold, 2010). Specifically, being a successful runner and pushing beyond limits is experienced as empowering and an opportunity to resist discursive and binary constructions of the ‘ideal’ female body (Hanold, 2010). However, while these perspectives take into account the situatedness of running embodiment, they are *about* the body, rather than *from* the body where the body is the tool of inquiry.

Phenomenology and the running body

Alternatively, phenomenological accounts of the running body focus on individual experiences of the body. These perspectives centre lived and living experience, while acknowledging the influences of various discourses on how the body is discursively constructed. However while these powerful influences are certainly discussed and considered (see Hanold, 2010; Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007; Jaeschke et al, 2016), individuals have agency over which discourses they choose to resist or submit to. A concept alluded to in Foucault's later work (1988), and explored from a phenomenological perspective in the sporting research (Kerry & Armour, 2000), including specific research relating to running (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2007; Koski, 2015). These perspectives explore the sensory elements of sport, focussing on the mind-body nexus and acknowledging the centrality of the body in the relationship between self-consciousness and the self (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2007).

While earlier tensions were thought to exist between Foucault and phenomenology, more recently the term *post-phenomenology* has been used to describe Foucault's work as viewed through a phenomenological lens (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte et al, 2023). Specifically, his exploration of power and discourses aligns with the phenomenological concern for lived experience and intersubjectivity (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte et al, 2023). In terms of the running body, a further alignment between these two theories is their mutual acknowledgment that subjectivity exists within a historical and cultural context.

Running involves repetition and a kinaesthetic and spatial awareness of the body (Hall et al, 2022). Crossley (2001) refers to the 'habit-body' as being absorbed in its surroundings, containing embodied knowledge and memory. Similar to Bourdieu's concept of 'Habitus' (Bourdieu, 1978) these theories refer to bodily acts that become integrated over time, with awareness of the body falling into the background and allowing other experiences to become foregrounded. For runners, this is when they become absorbed in their surroundings, experiencing a connection with nature and the space around them (Bale, 2004). A body that is perceived as indelible (Gadow, 1982), disappearing into the background allowing other sensory experiences to become foregrounded (Leder, 1991).

Merleau-Ponty's existentialist phenomenology positions the lived body at the centre of experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). By adopting this framework, the experience of runners is primarily on bodily engagement and the reciprocal relationship between the brain, body, and world. The meaning a runner gives to their experience is enacted in the interaction between the runner and their situation (Rochat et al, 2018). The inseparable nature of emotional, behavioural and sensory dimensions of activity is discussed in Rochat et al's (2018) research with trail runners. Despite referring to the individuality of lived experience, they identified similarities in their accounts suggesting that runner's worlds are shared as they gather similar embodied and cultural experiences. This finding aligns with the idea that

individual lived experience is influenced by the discourses that athletes choose to resist and submit to, with the body as a ‘reservoir’ of experiences, providing a memory and storage of experiences which are activated and mobilized in the specific moment of interaction with the environment (Lux et al, 2021).

Research that captures embodiment is relatively sparse, partly due to the fact that traditional scientific methods of inquiry tend to focus on objective accounts of behaviour, making it difficult to access corporeal lived experience. As such, understanding embodied experience requires exploration of other methodological perspectives to ‘flesh out’ the analysis (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2007). These methodological considerations remain a key focus of the research in this thesis.

1.4 Socio-cultural influences on Running

To provide context to the individual experiences of runners, and specifically for ultra-runners (the focus of this thesis and defined in section 1.5), a representation of how running has been positioned within neo-liberal society and culture is important as it illustrates the evolution of discourses and influences that impact corporeal subjectivity.

According to Athletics Australia, 3 million Australians participate in running, which makes running the largest and most popular sport and physical activity in the country (AusPlay, 2023). Arguably one of the most accessible sports, some of the most famous endurance runners originate from developing countries such as Kenya and Nigeria making it one of the only sports that transcends race and perceived wealth, providing opportunities for athletes to compete and succeed alongside athletes from other nations often on neo-colonialist terms. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there was an estimated 65% increase in running and jogging activities with participation rates the highest in the USA, across Europe (especially Germany and Italy) and the United Kingdom (RunRepeat, 2023). Given its popularity across the globe running provides a useful platform to explore the varying discourses that influence the experiences of athletes more generally. Of particular interest in this thesis, is the cultural significance of running as a way of providing context to individual embodied experience.

Cultural historian Martha Verbrugge (1988) provided her own speculation about the significance of running, suggesting that while running is an internal experience it represents a rebellion against middle-class capitalist values and a reaction to social dys-ease. A return to individualism over collectivist attitudes and beliefs. This idea was elaborated by McDougall in his book ‘Born to Run’ (McDougall, 2010) where he makes connections between spikes in running race participation with global events such as the Great Depression and Vietnam War. In this context, running represents an individual response to social dys-ease, and a (re)focus on the self. Similarly in her PhD dissertation,

Sociologist Kristen Owen Westfall (2012) suggests that running is a reflection and representation of our society, with heightened periods of running coinciding with the rise in neoliberalism in the 1970's and the rise of the capitalist class. These theories all point to the suggestion that running has evolved in part as a resistance to social and political change.

Distance running in particular has been used as a vehicle for cultural and political resistance. In 1967 Kathrine Switzer became the first female to participate in a marathon, an event where women were not allowed to enter due to illogical discourses around risk and fertility (Jutel, 2003). Stories and images of the event were broadcast through mainstream media, representing a pivotal moment in the history of women's running (Switzer, 2009), and a defiant resistance to dominant discourses about the fragility of women's bodies.

These influences provide a context for individual experience in a way that situates the running body within a rich fabric of discourse that has evolved over the decades, with running itself providing opportunities for cultural and political resistance. As we move into the twenty-first century running has continued to evolve, moving into more extreme and physically demanding arenas. It could be argued that running has evolved alongside political and cultural movements representative of extreme capitalism and neo-liberal influence. For example, while the marathon was once considered the pinnacle event of human strength and endurance, athletes are finding new ways to demonstrate and test their humanity in a neo-liberal culture where overcoming suffering is seen as social capital (Le Breton, 2000).

1.5 The rise of Ultra-Running

Ultra-Running events or races cover distances from 50km up to several hundred kilometres over several days. These events are often held in mountainous regions, across varying and challenging terrain. While its origins date back to the 19th Century, the first formal ultra-running race was an 88km event in the 1920's, The Comrades Marathon in South Africa (Mikula, 2017). With a total of 35 runners participating in that event, the sport has grown considerably with participation rates for many races now in the thousands. Exploring the trends in ultra-running from over fifteen thousand events across 23 years, a study by RunRepeat (2020) discovered a 1676% increase in participation since 1996, while participation in shorter distances up to and including the marathon have stabilized. The number of ultra-running events has also exploded to around 10,000 worldwide. While many refer to ultra-marathon events as 'races', the term is often dropped given that the most common motivating factor for ultra-marathoners is about achieving milestones and personal goals as opposed to a time or podium finish (Waskiewicz et al, 2018). In this sense, ultra-running sits outside many of the dominant discourses that influence sport more generally. For example, performance discourses about winning and chasing a 'personal best' in addition to gendered discourses (Stevenson, 2002) and discourses of

whiteness that serve to evoke or enforce hidden signs of racial (spatial) superiority and cultural hegemony (Fusco, 2005).

Once positioned as an ‘extreme’ sport of endurance, the increase in popularity of ultra-running has seen a growing number of runners identifying as ‘ultra-runners’. In response, the sport itself has adapted to provide unique experiences for only a few ‘elite’ ultra-runners shifting the focus for many athletes from personal accomplishment and ‘just finishing’ to performance and racing. A sport that once sat outside many of the disciplinary forces existing within sport, now sits firmly within the walls of sporting discourse. Neoliberalist ideals previously resisted can be seen today in the power structures and disciplinary forces emerging within the sport of ultra-running.

*Submitting to neo-liberal discourse: The **elite** ultra-runner.*

With the rise in popularity of ultra-running, corporate sponsorship and endorsements have culminated in the emergence of a global world series from 2022. While this has provided exciting opportunities for some, it has also created a division between the ‘average’ and the ‘elite’. A class system that (re)produces neoliberal discourse.

From 2022, The UTMB (Ultra-Trail Mont-Blanc) World Series circuit comprises 39 events across 22 countries and is based on the principles of surpassing one’s limits, fair play, respect for people and the environment and solidarity (<https://montblanc.utmb.world/>). The World Series integrates three levels of events culminating in the UTMB World Series Finals. Runners have the option of requesting a *UTMB Index*, which assesses their performance across the 4 race categories (20km, 50km, 100k and 100 miles). A valid UTMB Index is mandatory to enter the finals; the Dacia UTMB Mont-Blanc. This is the pinnacle event for ultra-runners and is held in Chamonix each year. An event that is out of reach for the overwhelming majority of ultra-runners around the globe. In Australia, the UTA (Ultra-Trail Australia) is held in Katoomba NSW every year, and is one of the UTMB World Series events, meaning that it draws in a number of international athletes. Beginning in 2008 with a single distance event comprising 130 runners, the UTA is now under the newly formed world series banner and consists of 5 different distances hosting around 7,000 runners (Hanney, 2019).

The rise of the ‘elite’ ultra-runner, also perpetuates and reinforces binary notions of ‘elite and non-elite’. These binary and dualistic notions are deeply entrenched within ableist and medical discourse, providing an important context for the ultra-runners’ experiences of pain and injury, which is a key focus of the research in this thesis.

1.6 Ultra-runners' subjective experiences of discomfort and pain

Regardless of whether an athlete identifies as 'elite', ultra-runners generally spend many hours a week running, with some estimates suggesting an average of around 66-83km per week (Scheer & Krabak, 2021). These training demands commonly lead to a range of overuse injuries including musculoskeletal injuries as well as non-injury related discomfort and pain (Scheer & Krabak, 2021).

Different sport types are associated with different experiences of pain. In the world of endurance sport in particular, pain has a different ontology (Bale, 2004). Endurance athletes who perform aerobic activity for prolonged periods of time in particular have been shown to exhibit improved pain inhibition in comparison with strength-based sport (Assa et al, 2019). Specifically, they were found to be less sensitive to pain, and demonstrated an ability to tolerate more pain than non-athletes or athletes participating in other types of sport (Assa et al, 2019). These athletes spend considerable time pushing their bodies to their limits and 'digging in' or setting an enduring frame of mind to defend from human frailties like fatigue, discomfort and pain (Hockey & Allen Collison, in Markula et al, 2016). It could either be that they are desensitised to pain as in the previous research by Assa et al (2019), or they have developed a deep kinaesthetic awareness of their embodied experience. The latter, allowing them to be led by their corporeality instead of cognitively responding to felt experiences of discomfort or pain.

In line with this theory, it has been suggested that endurance runners are cognitively attuned to their bodies via an enduring consciousness of physical movement. This accumulates in the somatic experience of habitual pains, allowing the athlete to formulate contextual strategies to deal with these experiences (Hockey & Allen Collinson in Bridel et al, 2016). In Rochat et al's (2018) research with ultra-runners, they found that athletes enact specific phenomenological gestalts when experiencing pain or discomfort during an ultra-running event. Gestalts that emerge from activity and scaffold the runners' courses of experience. Further, they suggested that these athletes make sense of their world by acting in relation to fluctuations in physical sensations and environmental conditions during an ultra-trail running event (Rochat et al, 2018).

Not only is pain experienced differently within the context of endurance sport, it also holds symbolic value, perceived as the deposit or investment through which performance is extracted (Bale, 2004). For distance runners, niggling, annoying and minor problems are normalised with their bodies becoming actual and symbolic maps etched with injury sites (Hockey & Allen Collinson in Bridel et al, 2016). As such, the meaning these athletes make from pain involves a complex and non-linear process involving an integration of bodily knowledge, internalised discourse and sensitivity to their surroundings and environment. Sensitivities to the environment also include anticipated reactions and responses from others, especially other athletes. The haptic and visual sensations experienced by ultra-runners when they experience pain, are subjective experiences that are also deeply rooted in the

runner's peer group socialisation (Lev, 2020; Hall et al, 2022). A similar finding by Atkinson (2008) in his work with endurance triathletes suggests that these athletes come together as a mutually recognised 'pain community' of like-minded actors. His work recognises the performative element of how pain is demonstrated in order to secure and reinforce belonging to the athletes community. Specifically, for these athletes pain is not just an individual experience, but also expresses other relationships forming part of the story these athletes express about their relationship with their bodies, with their peers and to the sport more generally (Roessler, in Loland et al, 2006).

One of the most significant questions surrounding experiences of pain for athletes, and more specifically ultra-runners, is whether the pain signals injury. Once the body has become foregrounded through pain, the athlete must then make sense of the experience in order to inform a response. Either to continue running, or stop. This is a complex and nonlinear decision with significant consequences for the athlete. Research exploring ultra-runners' decision to withdraw from an event suggest that while pain or discomfort may be the initial trigger for race withdrawal, the final decision is the culmination of a nonlinear sequence of experiences organised around the runners body self-awareness (Philippe et al, 2016). Coping strategies for pain and discomfort used during an event include modifying and adapting pace, gait and altering hydration and nutrition. In response, the runner develops a hyperawareness to somatic experiences engaging in an iterative process of meaning making (Philippe et al, 2016; Simpson et al, 2014). When an ultra-runner is unable to continue running due to injury, the experience can be jarring for the athlete triggering a shift in subjectivity that mobilises a number of various coping strategies.

1.7 The injured Ultra-running body

While pain and discomfort are common experiences with ultra-runners, injury foregrounds the body often in a jarring way causing the body to become the object of intentionality (Leder, 1990; Hall et al. 2022). The injured sporting body has traditionally been perceived through medical and ableist discourses perpetuating and reinforcing familiar dualistic notions of the body as injured/sick or able/well. These discourses all influence how athletes experience their injured bodies. Ultra-runners' bodies in particular are discursively mediated and (re)produced by a constant awareness that the body needs to be fit and strong, and at times in need of improvement (Hall et al, 2022; Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007).

In their work exploring the emotional dimension of the sporting (endurance running) body, Hockey & Allen Collinson (2005) refer to the liminality of the injured athletic role and a desire to maintain positive identities. They refer to the objectification of the affected body part through first person alienation as a way of coping. This is in line with Leder (1990) and Sveneaus (2011) and their references to the body as becoming alien and unhomelike in the face of illness and injury, drawing the

athlete into medical narratives and expert driven ‘answers’ which cause them to surrender their own illness or injury narrative (Frank, 1990). This suggests that first person body alienation serves to neutralize the uncomfortable shift in subjectivities that result from being in a body that is fallible. By submitting to narratives of restitution (Frank, 1990), the injured athlete seeks a medical ‘answer’ that will see them return to their former running self. From this perspective, a dualistic separation of the mind and body allows the injured athlete to retain their running identity. This is demonstrated by runners focusing on their injury by investing in medical narratives, talking about their injury story to others and even continuing to wear their running clothes throughout their rehabilitation journey (Hockey, 2005). Many athletes also refer to a distrust in a medical ‘system’ that tells them to cease running when injured. For these runners, they will engage in multiple consultations with different medical professionals in an attempt to find someone who they feel ‘understands’ their body (Hockey, 2005). Often the desire is to locate a professional that will approve of their continued running. For Hockey & Allen Collinson (2011) this process culminated in them taking their rehabilitation into their own hands, and formulating their own treatment plan based on their own body familiarity. While resisting the medical gaze, these academic endurance runners submitted to other discourses in their desire to return to their former running selves.

The medical gaze in turn plays a crucial role in invalidating bodies that do not conform to the norm, reinforcing ableist discourse (Loja et al, 2013). Ultra-runners’ response to injury is at the nexus of body and corporeal familiarity and socio-cultural discourse. In order to resist these discourses, disability researchers advocate for a ‘being in the world that embodies resistance’ (Loja et al, 2013). Meaning that through recognition and a demonstrated acceptance of diversity, injured or disabled athletes can be seen and their embodied experiences validated.

While research has begun to delve into the embodied experiences of ultra-runners experiencing injury, much of the research relies on verbal and narrative methodologies. For example, Hockey and Allen-Collinson’s ethnographic field work (2005/2007/2015), and interview based research examining experience within the context of socio cultural discourses (described above). While these types of research methodologies enable exploration of lived and living experience from a phenomenological perspective, they privilege verbal and narrative storytelling. This means that they are limited in their ability to access multilayered and non-verbal embodied experience. What is needed is research that considers embodied experience in its design, method and analysis. For example, research that utilises a combination of narrative inquiry alongside arts based methods that capture non-verbal embodied experience and multi-layered story telling. These research gaps were deeply considered in this thesis resulting in an innovative research design and project that centres the embodied experiences of ultra-runners.

1.8 Thesis overview and aims

The overarching objective of this thesis was to understand and explore the embodied experiences of ultra-runners who had experienced injury. By repositioning the injury experiences of these athletes into an embodied framework and acknowledging the situatedness of their experiences, the aim of this thesis was to provide unique insights and knowledge about the intersection between corporeal subjectivity and the various discourses that these athletes resist and submit to. These aims were addressed in several steps:

1. Repositioning injury within an embodiment framework. This involved synthesising the existing literature about the sporting body, as context for a discussion about how ultra-runners' bodies are discursively produced. By foregrounding the work of phenomenological existentialists such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the experience of injury for ultra-runners was (re)positioned within an embodied framework. This theoretical paper can be found in Chapter 2.
2. A qualitative meta synthesis was then conducted, which involved a hermeneutic analysis of ten interview studies using meta-ethnography. The interview studies involved narratives of ultra-runners who had experienced injury. Their experiences were then reorganised around an embodiment framework resulting in five taxonomies. The disciplined body, embodied distress, corporeal running identity, intersubjectivity of pain and embodied coping. These taxonomies explored the ways these injured athletes resist and submit to various discourses positioning embodied subjective experience within a socio-cultural context. This study is detailed in Chapter 3.
3. Eight in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, along with eight detailed body maps co-created with ultra-runners who had recently been injured. While the interviews explored narrative constructions of their experiences, the body maps allowed for a multi-layered and embodied exploration of their injury experiences (Boydell, 2021). Plot lines were woven through the visual and textual material. Stories of body-self transformation, the body-as-machine and the ageing body were captured through combining the narrative data and body maps. The paper includes a discussion about the points of divergence between the interviews and artworks, with the visual body maps holding space for participants to explore the invisible parts of themselves. Drawn into discursive athletic performance narratives, participants were able to access different stories told through body maps. This study is reported in Chapter 4.
4. An overall summary of the findings, including a discussion about the theoretical and practical implications of this project is included in Chapter 5. Also included is a discussion about the ethical considerations of doing arts based research, the misnomer of researcher neutrality (Rose, 1985), as well as suggestions for future directions.

Methodological considerations

In order to contribute to the knowledge about the embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners, consideration about appropriate research methodologies was required. Specifically, utilizing methods that enable participants to access their lived embodied experiences in a way that captures layered subjectivity and deeply rooted experience. Pain itself is often not able to be articulated verbally as it resists and even destroys language (Scarry, 1985). As such using arts based research methods enabled participants to access and represent parts of themselves inaccessible through language alone. With their focus on small scale interactions, arts based methods also open up new creative spaces within which to understand experiences of being in the world (Orchard, 2017). These types of participant generated data also produces research experiences that can be emancipatory and more closely represent the lives and living experience of participants (Orchard, 2017).

Body mapping in particular was selected because of its focus on embodied experience (Boydell, 2021). By tracing around a person's body and supporting them to emplace their experiences onto their life sized body map the body becomes foregrounded. This allows the participant or artist to immerse themselves in their embodied history (Malecki, 2021). As such, body mapping acts at a number of levels to increase awareness and perception of injury while also encouraging rethinking about the meaning of pain and injury, and the contexts in which these meanings are made (Tarr and Thomas, 2011). As an epistemology that is interaction and experience oriented, it resists positivist discourse by shifting the focus from the product of research to the process (Seregina, 2019).

Body mapping is a collaborative process between the artist and researcher that focuses on knowledge as an interactive process through artistic practice (Boydell, 2021; Seregina, 2019). This is in contrast to positivist and realist forms of inquiry where text and verbal knowledge is preferred. However language is a limited medium as it involves no experiential aspects (Warren, 2002). In arts based research such as body mapping the position of the researcher is co-creator and collaborator, as opposed to objective inquirer (Boydell, 2021; Skop, 2016). In order to reduce researcher bias a position of reflexive inquiry is adopted where the researcher reflects on their own responses and reactions (Skop, 2016). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 as it relates to the body mapping study in this project. With its focus on multi-layered storytelling, body mapping illustrates the limitations of using interview data alone (Tarr and Thomas, 2011).

While the body maps allowed for multi-layered story telling (Boydell, 2021), the narrative interviews demonstrated the situatedness of experience by capturing discursive constructions around ultra-running more generally, as well as experiences of pain and injury. These stories illustrated the influences of powerful discourses in participants meaning making. Specifically, discourses of strength and endurance, as well as the performative elements of pain and injury in reinforcing participants' membership to the ultra-running community (Atkinson, 2008). Together these two sets of data

illustrate the rich complexity of embodied experiences for these athletes, positioning injury not only as a physical malfunction requiring medical intervention but an experience that has the potential to create seismic shifts in embodied subjectivity. Experiences that can open windows of past pain and trauma, crossing temporal boundaries as discussed in Chapter 4.

Consideration was also given as to how these two sets of empirical data could be represented. Traditional research methods often separate different forms of data, offering a linear process of inquiry. However, this project combines the data, creating a meshing of experience with plot lines delicately woven throughout so as not to disembodify the experiences of the participants by pulling apart their stories. In this way, this project demonstrates and reflects a truly embodied methodology.

Data Analysis

After selecting the two forms of qualitative methodological inquiry, methods of data analysis were selected by considering how best to represent embodied experience, while staying true to the lived experiences of the participants.

With regard to analysis of the body maps, a naturalistic version of content analysis was selected (Rose, 2016), where a key was developed for each body map describing the colours and symbols and the meaning attributed to these in the artist's own words. Next, the narrative interviews were analysed through an iterative process of meaning condensation grounded in the philosophical hermeneutic tradition (Diekelman & Ironside 2006). The goal of this process was to understand meaning and to make sense of experience, uncovering what it means *to be* as it shows up or reveals itself through the story (Vandermause & Fleming 2011). This is in contrast to category methods of narrative analysis where narratives are distilled into coding units by taking snippets of a story often edited out of context (Riessman, 2008). Rather, analysis involved combining the two forms of data for each participant, while tracking between the visual and narrative material looking for embodied themes. In this way, their rich stories were kept whole. The eight merged visual and narrative stories were then compared, with common images and themes identified. Plot lines were then identified, and woven through the visual and textual data. These plot lines were a way of organising the stories into temporally meaningful episodes making explicit the operations that produce meaning and draw out their implications (Polkinghorne, 1988). This allowed for the participants lived experiences to be kept whole, allowing a creative polyphony of rich storytelling.

Impact of COVID-19

The UTMB World Series emerged after two years of restrictions and lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 saw the cancellation of many events due to the pandemic, with an 11 fold decrease in finishers (Scheer et al, 2021).

The athletes in this thesis were interviewed in 2022, and immediately after the most recent restrictions in NSW, meaning that all had experienced disappointment at events being delayed and cancelled. For many, this had a significant impact on their running volume. Rather than recovering after an event, these participants continued running in the hope of the event being rescheduled to a later date. The uncertainty with regard to restrictions as well as the financial cost associated with running these events, meant that event organisers opted to postpone rather than cancel events outright. As such, runners would continue running at high volumes as opposed to the taper (decrease in running volume) that occurs during training two weeks before an event. Several participants indicated that this contributed to their running injury.

This aligns with the research which states that higher training volume coupled with changes in external stressors can lead to an increased injury risk for runners (DeLong et al, 2022). The same researchers found that on average, runners increased their total running volume during the first full year of the pandemic (DeLong et al, 2022). In their survey data of 1,147 runners across fifteen countries, DeLong et al (2021) suggested that this increase in running volume during the pandemic was directly linked to heightened injury risk, a finding supported by the research in this thesis.

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Chapter 2

Ultra-running: Repositioning the Injury Experience within an Embodiment Framework

2.1 Chapter overview

The first step in addressing this project's aims and objectives of exploring the embodied experiences of ultra-runners who had experienced injury, was to collate and synthesis the existing literature base about injury and ultra-running and reposition the findings within an embodiment framework through the discourses of existential phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault. This chapter consists of a published manuscript entitled: *Ultra-running: Repositioning the Injury Experience within an Embodiment Framework*. This study identified existing literature about the ultra-running subculture and the multiplicity of discourses that these athletes either resist or submit to when experiencing pain or injury. By centring the embodied experiences of the injured athlete, the alternative framework presented resists positivist discourse providing a pathway for further inquiry about the corporeal experiences of ultra-runners experiencing injury.

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2.2 Abstract

Ultra-marathon runners cover distances longer than the marathon distance of 42.2 km, with some events covering several hundred kilometres over several days. Training for these events places significant demands on the mind and body and involves many hours of solitary running. The physical demands of this sport mean that injuries are not uncommon. These injuries represent *physical failings* which significantly impact the way these athletes experience and relate to their bodies. An injury may bring the body into an unfamiliar awareness, particularly for runners who had previously viewed and/or experienced their bodies as unproblematic. Medical discourse is built upon a dualistic discourse that works to polarise the mind and body. The uptake of this discourse may recruit runners into a medical narrative that further alienates them from their body, causing them to surrender their own personal narratives and meanings of the injury process. The liminal experience of injury then becomes one of uncertainty, with a focus on returning to a state of health. This paper seeks to provide an alternative framework for conceptualizing injury in ultra-marathon runners by resisting the dominance of dualistic medical discourse to understand how injured runners can keep their own experience of their body central to their recovery. This paper repositions the experience of injury by drawing on a theoretical framework (e.g. Merleau-Ponty and Foucault) and identifying the multiplicity of discourses that may be taken up and resisted by ultra-running athletes in the construction of their narratives of injury. This process has the potential to assist runners as they navigate the experience of injury in ways that are sustaining and emotionally healing, regardless of the outcome of injury.

2.3 Embodied Running

The term “ultra-running” is often used synonymously with the term “ultra-marathon” or even “endurance running”. For the purposes of this paper, ultra-running refers to running events that cover distances longer than the traditional marathon distance of 42 km, with events ranging between 50 and 160 km, to several hundred kilometres run over several days. These events involve not only vast distance, but varying altitudes and challenging terrain with most ultra-events occurring in mountainous regions with some single trails as opposed to sealed roads. This often involves long-solitary hours of running (Jaeschke, 2016) requiring a heightened kinaesthetic awareness of their bodies and an embodied experience of “space” as they navigate their running course (Hanold et al. 2016). With regard to how much time ultra-runners spend training, results vary considerably. In their research with female ultra-runners, Krouse et al., (2011) found that some runners trained as little as 3 h per week, whilst others train up to 37.5 h per week (Krouse et al., 2011). Despite this variation, the requirements of this sport place considerable demands on these athletes both physically and mentally (Noakes, 2006), especially given that these runners spend considerably more time on training runs

than they do competing in actual events. The uniqueness of the hypnotic and rhythmic movements combined with the frequency and duration of training may be understood through Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment. According to Merleau-Ponty, the world is experienced both with and through the senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). They are not at all separate, meaning that we experience the world *through* our body, not *with* our body. From this perspective runners exemplify embodiment through habituated action, as running begins with the body, and it is through the body that the runner interacts and experiences the world. Embodiment refers to human action and interaction with the world, which is guided by the body. An ultra-runner is for the most part not consciously directing their legs and arms to move. Their actions exist on a pre-reflective level (Bale, 2004). They are habituated actions, guided by the body. This pre-reflective dimension is an experience that is bodily anchored and difficult to grasp and measure in a scientific sense (Stelter, 2000). Emotive and cognitive processes have their roots in the body because they are interlinked and exist to guide action itself (Fuchs & Schlimme, 2009). For ultra-runners this means that they may experience running as a dynamic interplay between mind and body, whereby the two are intricately connected and interwoven to form an embodied action.

2.4 Injury through a Dualistic Discourse

Biomedicine asserts that the body is subject to mechanical laws, whilst the mind is not (Descartes, in Cottingham (ed) 1986). This cartesian dualism suggests that when the mechanics fail, as in the case of an injury, treatment and intervention should focus on correcting the mechanics whilst the mind remains relatively separate and intact. Medical discourse dualistically separates both the body and mind, and "health" or "normality" from "illness" and "disease". However, health is not merely the absence of deviation, but the capacity relative to potential and aspirations for living fully in the social environment (Bircher, 2005). The dualism of health discourse obscures the fluidity and multifaceted nature of health, to one of either "health" or "illness/sickness". Furthermore, the understanding and assessment of an individual's experience through a culturally defined and measured social filter risks dismissing their own lived experience, pathologizing responses to social and cultural diseases and trauma (Murray, 2015). These socio-cultural filters may significantly shape an individual's subjectivity and their lived experience of injury. What are the implications of a dualistic view of illness for those experiencing disease, illness or even injury? When a runner sustains an injury to their iliotibial band, their embodied experience is both visceral and emotional, as the arresting nature of their injury brings the body to the foreground often in an unfamiliar way creating a unique individual experience (Csordas, 1997). Medical positivism is limited in how it can respond to the liminal experience of the injured runner, which is highly individual. This may have potential implications on both treatment and recovery. Most, if not all, injured athletes are motivated to return to their sport as

soon as possible (Allen Collinson, 2005; Curry, 1993; Hreljac, 2004; Krouse et al., 2011; Laurendeau, 2014), and whilst the focus is on injury management and rehabilitation, the mind is often consumed by the desire to compete/train again (Sparkes, 1988). Under these circumstances, athletes filter their injury experience through the cultural discourses that exist around sport and performance, as well as the threat that the injury poses to their athletic identity (Hockey, 2005; Sparkes, 1988; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). The dominant medical discourse risks obscuring the individual processes athletes engage in to negotiate their identity in the context of a significant injury. The biomedical conceptualisation of health also creates a culturally sanctioned “truth” which elevates the medical professional within society. This creates a social and cultural dynamic whereby the medical industry exerts significant power and influence (Foucault, 1994). Whilst it is important to acknowledge the inherent difficulties in attempting to define such a broad concept, it is also important to reflect on how these definitions of “health” shape our current understanding of both health and disease/illness. Biomedical conceptualisations tend to promote a disembodied understanding of health, one which has the tendency to minimise individual meanings and experiences, and instead contributes to dominant cultural discourse around what health looks and feels like *for everyone*. As described by (Frank, 2013), the “ill” person is always “other” to a society that defines *health* as the norm. As such, the ill person’s journey is about reuniting with the norm often as quick as possible. The power of the medical profession is in the promise of the reinstatement of health (Frank, 2013). The elevation of medical discourse to truth status in relation to the human body and mind; however, risks silencing the voice of the person in matters related to their own health. According to Philosopher Michel Foucault, bodies are disciplined through medical gaze (Foucault, 1994). This refers to the power assigned to medical professionals, and the impact of this on subjugating the embodied experiences of the patient. This gaze is often unquestioned creating a culturally sanctioned “truth”. Furthermore, through the uptake of medical discourse as the unquestioned truth, individuals are often incited to operate on their own bodies, and in doing so, the medical gaze produces bodies that are docile (Foucault, 1994). Through these processes the dominant treatment practices become biomedically and “doctor focused” and what can be lost in this discourse is the person’s narrative and meaning making of their embodied experiences. Alternatively, critics of dualistic approaches such as Leder (1990) and Zaner (1971) reject the view of the body as a “machine” in favour of a view in which the body is itself a subject, an embodied self. An embodied approach to health states that health (and therefore illness) is an *experience* centred in the body (Svenaeus, 2000, 2011). A way of being which is not defined by malfunction or imperfections, or a capacity to live fully in the social environment, but an *experience* grounded in the body with spatial, temporal, social and embodied form (Murray, 2015). By this definition of health, individual meaning and experience are central. An embodied approach to injury therefore represents a resistance to the dualism of medical discourse providing runners with another way of conceptualising their experience. Whilst biomedicine specifies illness or disease as a physiologically defined malfunction, hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on both health and

illness as ways of being in the world (Kugelmann in Murray (ed), 2015). This paper takes a Social Constructivist position where illness and disease are based on social and cultural ideas of what is not desirable, and subjectivity is influenced by medical discourse (Conrad & Barker, 2010). According to Foucault, medical knowledge in this sense is a form of power as it constructs discourse about the body, including illness and disease (Conrad & Barker, 2010; Foucault, 1994). For injured ultra-runners, this means that their experiences of injury and pain are positioned within the many discourses that exist and influence these athletes, including medical discourse. Merleau-Ponty's views on intentionality and embodied experience may, in fact, provide opportunities for these athletes to resist some of these discourses by centring the body and subjectivity. Human beings are dynamic and unique. Personal meanings are attributed to concepts such as health and illness, and often frustration is experienced when a medical practitioner focuses only on biological deviations and neglects to take into account the person's narrative about their experience. When a person presents with an illness, they perceive themselves as having an altered state of existence (Frank, 2013; Svenaeus, 2000). Through the experience of the body as "unfamiliar", illness can cause a person to view their body in an objectified way. When this happens there can be a noticeable disconnect between the explicit inferences of the doctor, who performs with authority and certainty with an acquired knowledge that sits outside the experience of the patient, and the existential experiences of liminality and uncertainty of their "patient" (Gold, 1985). This may mean that the person's own narrative changes or adapts accordingly. This *narrative surrender*, whereby the core social experience of being unwell is surrendered to the care of a medical professional, is a core component of the modern day illness/injury experience (Frank, 2013). This process further alienates the person from their body, often resulting in an experience of un-homelike being-in-the-world (Svenaeus, 2011). Similarly, these same processes apply to injury, as physical injury and illness more often than not result in a similar outcome. An inability, either temporary or permanent, to return to full functioning and a potential disembodiment perpetuated by dualistic approaches where the body is seen as alien or *uncanny* (Svenaeus, 2011; Zaner, 1971). According to Heidegger (1996), *otherness* is the phrase used to describe a foreignness that permeates life when a lived body takes on alien qualities; in this case, an injury. However, according to Svenaeus (2000, 2011), this concept of otherness or *alienness* needs to be interpreted in relation to the *whole world* of injury or illness as opposed to just the lived body (Svenaeus, 2011). An injury therefore not only causes the body to feel alien, but in certain circumstances leads to the whole world feeling alien. This is because from a phenomenological perspective the lived body is not extrinsic to the self, and so a threat to the body, in this case an injury, incorporates a threat to the very sense of *self* (Toombs, 1988). Certain populations are affected more substantially by injury, particularly if the injury prevents or impairs their ability to perform tasks that are highly valued, tasks that contribute to a strong identity and sense of "self" (Hockey, 2005; Sparkes, 1988). For a runner who experiences an injury that prevents or impairs their ability to run, their body takes on an

alienness triggered by an unfamiliar disturbance in the body, disrupting their sense of being-in-the-world (Svenaesus, 2000, 2011). This grief experience could potentially be compounded if the runner is unable to return to their sport, which would involve further identity re-storying and negotiating (Hockey, 2005).

2.5 Injury as Embodied Disruption

Injury is common in the world of ultra-running (Hoffman & Krishnan, 2014). The demands of their sport arguably place ultra-runners at greater risk for developing exercise-based problems and injuries. In one of the largest studies of ultra-runners, over half (77%) were found to have experienced a running-related injury in the past year which interfered with training (Hoffman & Krishnan, 2014). These runners were more likely to be younger and less experienced. The fact that older and more experienced runners are less likely to sustain running-related injuries perhaps points to a suggestion that experienced runners have physically adapted due to years of running, but it could also be suggestive of an *embodied experience*, a seamless relationship and understanding of the body and how it feels when running, developed over years of learning to listen to the body and responding to its needs. Due to the pre-reflective nature of running, an ultra-runner may describe specific “feelings” when they run without a conscious awareness of where these feelings originate. They are embodied feelings, guided by the body (Roald et al., 2018). These processes occur seamlessly for an ultra-runner, until of course something happens to bring consciousness to these processes, such as an injury. Injury brings the body into an unfamiliar awareness. For injury-free ultra-runners, the body is experienced as indelible, unproblematic (Gadow, 1982). For a runner who has never experienced an injury, their body is a vessel which provides them with a sense of achievement and an athletic identity (Hockey, 2005; Sparkes, 1988). According to Leder (1990), action manifests a *functional telos*. For the ultra-runner pursuing their goal of running, this suggests that they act with intention towards the world led by the body, not by conscious direction. Merleau-Ponty states that consciousness is a matter of “I can” not “I think” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945), meaning that acts such as walking, running and even speaking occur without an awareness of the source of these activities. Leder takes this further by suggesting a distinction between bodily dis-appearance and dys-appearance (Leder, 1990). He suggests that the body dis-appears when it is not a thematic object of experience. In other words, the body is experienced only pre-reflectively, moving to the background of awareness to allow for other experiences to be foregrounded. However, it could be argued that for an embodied runner, their body is always a thematic object of experience as they navigate moving their limbs through terrain which is often quite challenging. There is little opportunity for the body to move to the background of awareness because it is the object of intentionality (Bale, 2004). However, the body may then *dys-*appear when it experiences pain or injury, as it becomes the object of intentionality in an *unfamiliar*

and often arresting and confronting way. This could shift the runner's perspective of their body, and in doing so, shift their sense of being-in-the-world. According to Gadow (1982), this creates a state of "disrupted immediacy". Injury is signalled by discomfort and pain not only via its sensory intensification but also its temporality, meaning that it is experienced as episodic and discrete. Its unfamiliarity grabs the runner's attention in an unpredictable and uncontrollable way, and in doing so, it reorganises lived space and time as well as how they relate to themselves and others (Leder, 1990). Ultra-runners who experience ongoing pain, as an indication of chronic injury, represent a distinct and different group of athletes as their experience is marked by constant discomfort. These runners do not necessarily experience the sudden and episodic pain associated with acute injury, as their experience of pain itself becomes familiar (Simpson et al., 2014). For some, this may mean that they dissociate from the pain and for others, their embodied response means that they sit in the pain noticing its impact-making decisions based on how it is experienced (Holt et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2014). This is a concept that requires further investigation. In studying the cognitive strategies of marathon runners, Masters and Lambert (1989) discovered that competitive and driven runners tend to *associate* and be informed by pain, whilst *dissociation* seems to occur more on training runs where *performance* is not as valued. Alternatively, Brick et al. (2014) refer to an active dimension of coping or *active distraction*, which is a self-regulatory strategy. This suggests that rather than "dissociating" ultra-runners may focus on things like cadence and breathing as a way of coping with pain and/or discomfort. This implies a conscious response to pain whereby the runner's decision on how to respond is mediated by the *meaning* of running. Rather than representing a conscious or disembodied decision making process, Leder states that it is "the body's own tendency towards self-concealment that allows for its neglect or deprecation" (Leder, 1990, p. 69). He suggests that our organic basis can be easily forgotten due to the reticence of visceral processes. Of interest is whether ultra-runners disrupt this process, by maintaining a corporeal embodied awareness as opposed to bodily "neglect" and disappearance. What this suggests, is that the *unfamiliarity* of bodily experience triggered by pain and injury is what creates a shift in the runner's way of being, as opposed to the pain itself. As such, if pain and injury bring the body back into awareness in an unfamiliar and alien-like way, then perhaps some ultra-runners resist this by using strategies, such as active distraction or dissociation, to return to what is familiar? In addition, chronic pain sufferers may adapt and adjust to the point where the body slips back into a consciously driven *familiarity*, a state often associated with athletes and described previously as *normalizing* pain (Curry, 1993; Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007). Do these runners completely dissociate from the pain, or do they observe and monitor it using it as feedback for performance regulation? Furthermore, to what extent is this process influenced or mediated by socio-cultural discourses around medical dualism, running performance, endurance sport and identity? Ultra-running situates itself differently from the marathon, in that it constructs itself as having less of a competitive ethos (Hanold, 2010; Simpson et al., 2014). This means that the performance discourse is not as highly valued by many of these runners, replaced by different

discourses around endurance and “just finishing” (Bridel, 2016). Also, given that ultra-runners usually run on single trails with varying altitudes and geography, these athletes may have developed a corporeal awareness of space and their surroundings. For many, this experience of running in nature offers a sensory experience which connects the runner to former ways of being (Koski, 2015). Masters and Lambert (1989) conclude that it is not the injury itself that predicts which coping strategy a runner will employ but the history of the injury as well as the runner’s reasons for running. In other words, the *meaning* of running is represented by a complex interplay of social and cultural phenomena. It could also be argued that their response is mediated by their experience of their body, and whether the pain or injury experience causes their body to feel unfamiliar. A process heavily influenced by multiple discourses as well as the athlete’s knowledge of their body, including past injury experiences. Further research is needed to understand these embodied experiences. As such, an important consideration is the meaning of injury for runners from a phenomenological perspective. Does injury trigger an experience of “otherness”, influenced by familiar dualisms and resulting in the desire to restore their able bodied-ness? Of specific interest, is whether an embodied perspective of injury provides an opportunity to challenge this dualistic discourse. To answer these questions, one must unravel the individual narratives of injured runners to begin to understand their embodied experiences of pain and injury. For those ultra-runners who experience pain and injury, in dualistic terms they experience a breakdown of the machine, and although at first the injury is felt in a physical or sensory sense, its mental and emotional impacts have received less attention in the literature. Instead, medical discourse implies that the focus should be about treating the injury as soon as possible to prevent as little time as possible away from running. Very little attention is given to the injury experience and the disrupted immediacy or *unhomelikeness* that results. Neglecting the embodied experience in favour of focusing only on the physical cause of pain has a number of limitations. It has been suggested that this type of medical and scientific representations threaten to aggravate the alienation experienced when the body becomes a source of pain and an obstacle (Svenaeus, 2011; Toombs, 1988). Through this dualistic discourse, the ultra-runner could become further disconnected from their body and further entrenched in discursive practices which emphasise a quick return to running and “wellness”.

2.6 The Subculture of Ultra-Running

The concept of subculture is a dynamic interaction between behaviours, and artefacts are used by a particular group and diffused through interlocking group networks (Fine & Kleinman 1979). In the world of ultra-running, these shared values remain fairly static, creating a valued sense of belonging and camaraderie (Holt et al., 2014). For this relatively small and somewhat exclusive group, injury may conjure specific meaning, especially as it relates the social and cultural discourses around

running and endurance sport. Specifically, what does injury mean for runners as an embodied experience, and how do they position themselves in the medical discourse of recovery? A few researchers have explored this from their own experiences as runners who succumb to injury (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Allen Collinson, 2005; Walton-Fisette, 2017; Laurendeau, 2014). Certain athletic subcultures tend to ascribe specific meanings to injury, especially as it impairs or prevents them from engaging in the very activities which promote acceptance to the group (Brock & Kleiber 1994; Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Tarr & Thomas, 2011). How the corporeality of injury is understood is through the language forms available to the person at the time and within the context of their experiences. This is supported by Wainwright and Turner (2003) in research with dancers sustaining an injury where their injury experience was found to be mediated by the social bonding of dancers, and their injury experience contributed to the extent to which they were (re)incorporated into the culture of ballet. If we consider *social bonding* as occurring through a combination of language and culturally ascribed semiotics, it is possible to see how injury as a subjective experience is given meaning through social and cultural factors (Wainwright & Turner, 2003). This is consistent with the cultural phenomenological approach used by Tarr and Thomas (2011), influenced by Csordas (1997). In their research also with injured dancers they take into account both the embodied experiences of the dancers and also the ways in which these are culturally shaped and mediated (Tarr & Thomas, 2011). Similarly, in their biographical research with football players who have sustained a spinal cord injury, Sparkes and Smith (2002) suggest that their experiences of pain and injury are entrenched within a masculine world where rigid and hierarchical narratives of what a *real man* is, are situationally practised and continually reproduced. This occurs in the context of a sporting subculture that sanctions aggression, violence, control, discipline, force and the subordination of others as expressions of dominant hegemonic hypermasculinity (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Whilst ultra-runners do not experience the same professional pressures experienced by dancers, nor does their sport reproduce rigid narratives of hyper-masculinity, they do have their own subculture and runners do report a strong sense of camaraderie from being a part of the ultra-running environment (Holt et al., 2014). As such, much like dancers and football players, their experiences of pain and injury are also discursively practised and reproduced through multiple discourses that reinforce hierarchical social structures relating to middle-classness (Abbas, 2004). Interactionist approaches to sport subcultures in particular emphasise the significance of the socialisation process and the fact that acceptance to a particular group is directly related to demonstrations of appropriate skills as well as the confirmation of identity by established members of the group (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Furthermore, members who are unable to meet the requirements or satisfy expectations face ostracism or banishment from the group. In the case of ultra-runners who spend significant amounts of time training, an injury represents an inability to demonstrate the skills required for membership to the running subculture. As such injured ultra-runners may fear that they will face ostracism or be banished from the group when they are unable to run. If this is the case, it may

explain why some injured runners continue running through injury or return to running before their body has healed (Hreljac, 2004; Jaeschke et al., 2016). This may result in more enduring and/or chronic health issues.

Any injury which prevents or impairs running clearly involves a mechanical breakdown as defined by the dualistic biomedical model; however, it may represent something much more to the ultra-runner. Although the biomedical understanding of the injury itself is important, it represents the seed only, and the narrative and experience of the injury are the flesh which provides a context to the seed. The world of the ultra-runner refers to the entire fruit, seed and flesh. Both are fundamentally altered through injury. In their Editorial, *The Problem with Ultra-endurance athletes*, Wortley and Islas state, “...these athletes view their participation as something more than a race. For many, ultra-endurance racing is a mindset, a lifestyle, a culture within itself. It is what defines them as an individual.” (Wortley & Islas, 2011 p. 278). It could be suggested that for an ultra-runner, an injury involving loss of functionality could be a significant experience with potential impacts not only on their health, but their corporeal identities (Hockey, 2005). For runners who are unable to return to running, their experience of grief and loss may permeate their entire way of being. In these cases, sustained engagement in identity work may provide a sense of identity continuity (Allen Collinson, 2017) and holistic healing.

2.7 Chaos and Transformation

For runners, the concept of “self” is tied closely to their running identity. Ultra-runners represent a particular subculture of runners who share specific values, such as stoicism, endurance as well as tolerating fatigue, discomfort and even normalisation of pain (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Curry, 1993). The unique demands of this sport mean that membership to this particular subculture is considered by many to be rather exclusive (Simpson et al., 2014). There is substantial research relating to running-related injuries per se, among them (Messier, 1991; Macera, 1992; Hreljac, 2004; Fredericson & Wolf, 2005). However, not much is known about how ultra-runners or runners make sense of injury from a phenomenological perspective, particularly in relation to how injury can disrupt a runner’s corporeal identity. Two researchers, also long-distance runners, through their collaborative autoethnographic work, have managed to document their road to recovery focusing on themes around identity and the subjective temporal dimension of injury by employing a symbolic interactionist framework (Allen Collinson, 2003, 2005; Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007). Specifically, they discovered that their athletic identities were transformed during the rehabilitation process. Whilst initially, their injury narratives were based on restitution and restoring the self to the same self as pre-injury, towards the end of the process the meaning they attributed to running had shifted, resulting in

more care and caution. They became less invested in race times and positions and more concerned about appreciating the experience of running. The authors suggest that future research should consider what determines whether an injured runner will adapt to injury, or sink into depression (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007). Of interest is that both of these runners identify as “serious runners”, according to the typology offered by Smith. “Runners” in this context are differentiated from “Athletes” or elite runners and “Joggers” who train infrequently (Smith, 1998). What this means is that for Collinson and Hockey, who admit to decades of running experience between them, their running identity was, and perhaps still is, quite strong. As such, their injuries represent a destruction of their lived body as well as their world which would significantly impact injury recovery and adaptation. These identity struggles were mirrored by Walton-Fisette (2017). In her autoethnography, she identifies her own struggles maintaining a running identity as a runner with physical limitations. She describes her own desires to continue running despite the negative physical ramifications and her attempts to endure what she felt was left of her “able” running body. She argues strongly for the narratives of less able bodied athletes to be incorporated into recovery and rehabilitation programs. Focusing on what they feel is the cause of pain can become an obsession for runners, as their attention becomes fixated on returning to running (Allen Collinson, 2005). This fixation may provide a distraction from the fears and anxiety of not being able to run or having an unknown time away from their sport. At other times, this obsession and story-telling reinforce membership to the ultra-running subculture and running identity, worn as a badge of honour and evidence of pushing through barriers despite physical ramifications (Walton-Fisette, 2017). In their narrative reconstruction, Brock and Kleiber (1994) showed how athletes with career ending injuries present their injuries as being related to their sport in order to maintain a connection between their present life and their sports career. In their research, they suggested that it is important for the athlete to be able to show, with the help of a narrative about the injury, that it was directly caused by sports events, and that the injury can be seen and inspected by others. In that way it is possible for athletes to maintain both their identities as sports persons and their relationships to significant others in the world of sports (Brock & Kleiber, 1994). At other times, focusing or obsessing about a running-related injury is a demonstration of surpassing one’s limits (Allen Collinson, 2005; Hockey, 2005). The body becomes an alterego, an adversary that has its own will. In this way, pain, and with it often injury, becomes proof of the ultra-runner’s sincerity and commitment in a socio-historical context where personal value is measured by physical accomplishments (Le Breton, 2000). According to Bridel and Rail (2007), pushing the limits of the marathon body is in line with dominant discourses of high performance sport. As such, *pain* appears to be part of the runner’s identity and sense of self. However, at times where the injury endures and/or expectations relating to recovery are not met, the injury experience can then become one of suffering, a disembodied dualism between the physical body and psychological suffering. Illness disturbs the meaning processes of being-in-the-world which refers to the way human beings inhabit the world as a pattern of significance (Svenaeus, 2011). There

is always a mood aspect to being-in-the-world and in the case of illness, that mood calls for attention because it is uncomfortable. These moods and related emotional states fluctuate due to the liminality or ambiguity existing between a previous status (a runner) and a new status yet to be defined (Collinson, 2005). An injury becomes an “illness” when it permeates not only the world of the ultrarunner, but the very core of their identity. As such, the way an ultra-runner adapts to injury may centre around maintaining their running identity and working through the uncertainty and transition from one status to the next. Much of this is about accepting the discomfort associated with uncertainty. A concept ultra-runners are perhaps not accustomed to in their world is where training predicts results, and so much of their identity is about being a member of the ultra-running subculture (Holt et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2014). Identity itself develops through being-in-the-world, and the lived body is directed towards an experiencing world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). This experiencing world consists of cultural discourses that interact directly with the lived body. The body is dependent upon cultural repertoires and skills and is equally responsible for them. This is suggestive of an iterative process whereby the body both performs and reinforces culture simultaneously. It is the habituated actions of bodies which are therefore responsible for the reproduction of social formation. For ultra-runners, their running identity is best described as a constructed interaction between the lived body and the experiencing world. Sparkes (1988) refers to identity as a *reflexive project of the self*. He suggests that identity is not unified around a coherent self, rather it is formed and transformed continuously. This suggests an alternative to the somewhat static and singular reference to “identity”, in favour of a fluid concept representing several identities continuously responding to social and cultural influences. For the injured ultra-runner, this suggests that their running identities can potentially move with fluidity in response to their changing world. Consideration of the broader socio-cultural context is not only critical in understanding the meaning of running to an ultra-runner, but also in terms of how their reflexive project of the self can adjust and respond to injury. According to Bale (2004), an understanding of running cannot be achieved by simply looking at runners, without considering the cultural context in which running occurs. The same can be said for injured runners.

2.8 Multiplicity of Discourses

The medical discourse provides only a thin description of the lived experience of ultrarunners who experience injury. For these athletes, there is a multiplicity of discourses that interact to filter their embodied experience. According to Foucault (1991), power is a productive force which operates at the level of the body. In this sense, running as a disciplined practice promotes docile bodies capable of being manipulated and trained. Such forms of power are often legitimised by the medical narrative, promoting corporeal subjugation of the body. This suggests that the concept of *body image* is primarily socially constructed, a disciplinary effect of existing power relationships. Merleau-Ponty

provides a balance to this by focusing on the kinaesthetic aspects of bodily experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Whilst he rejects the idea of “body-image” because it loses sight of the fact that the body is never isolated in its activity, but always engaged within the world, Weiss (1999) proposes a *multiplicity* of body images that are co-present, and are constructed through a series of corporeal exchanges. However, certain social processes, such as the cultural “thin ideal” and the body as object, contribute to the abjection of the body (or parts of the body). These processes lead to distortions in body images which can influence the corporeal bodily experiences of athletes, in this case, ultra-runners. Body image is a powerful discourse which exerts its influence on most sports, including running (Hanold, 2010). Running as a way to obtain a more attractive body crosses gender lines (Bridel & Rail, 2007); however, when it comes to ultra-running, the cultural “ideal” for women is resisted, with many prioritizing physical strength and endurance as opposed to appearance and body shape (Hanold, 2010). Research examining the shared characteristics between runners and patients with anorexia identifies the role of running in achieving an ideal and valued body shape (Thompson & Sherman 1999). Some studies report a pre-occupation with thinness and a fear of gaining weight in distance runners (Brownell et al., 1988). Other studies also report the use of pathogenic weight-loss methods in distance runners (Rosen, 1986). One study indicated a 13% prevalence rate of anorexia nervosa in the histories of elite female runners (Clark et al., 1988). These shared characteristics point to an underlying cultural discourse about the distance running body for endurance or long-distance runners, the body archetype “distance running body” is lean, muscular, toned, slight but strong (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007). In this group it appears that running is a disciplinary tool used to subjugate the body in order to make it “fit” with cultural discourse. However, Hanold’s research is of particular interest. Her research with female ultra-runners suggests that equal if not more value is given to having a body that is physically equipped to deal with the challenges of their sport (Hanold, 2010). This suggests that perhaps ultra-running resists discourse about the ideal body “shape”. According to Hanold (2010), the strength of the female body discourse weakens through the process of being disciplined by an “ultra-running success” discourse. This results in a broader view of what counts as a legitimate running body. As such, ultra-running presents a unique opportunity for women in particular, to resist the dominant discourse of the “lean and toned” body. Whilst this suggests that ultra-running success may be a protective factor against over valuing body shape and subscribing to the broader cultural running body ideal, there is a suggestion that this is replaced by an *ultra-running success* discourse which reproduces neo-liberalist notions of self-empowerment through accomplishment (Hanold, 2010). This self-empowerment consists of discourses around mental toughness and the concept of “digging in”, which refers to the runner having an enduring frame of mind which defends the athlete from their own frailties in the face of fatigue, discomfort, pain and geographical stressors (Hockey & Allen Collinson, in Bridel et al., 2016 p. 229). Hence, there appears to be a moral discourse around ultra-running where digging in and pushing through pain is morally elevated. This suggests that stopping (when experiencing pain) contributes to a diminished moral

worth. Ultra-runners have been found to perceive mental toughness as a multifaceted construct, viewed through a specific lens (Jaeschke et al., 2016). For these athletes, mental toughness is the *embodiment* of the ability to persist and utilise mental skills to overcome perceived physical, psychological, emotional and environmental obstacles in relentless pursuit of a goal (Jaeschke et al., 2016). Some suggest that in extreme sports, such as ultra-running, the pain and suffering experienced by the athlete are the proofs of their sincerity and commitment (Le Breton, 2000), suggesting that for the sport of ultra-running, there is a discourse of pain tolerance where suffering in an embodied sense is valued and worn as a badge of honour and mark of success. Normalizing pain can therefore be interpreted as a cultural construct and outcome or consequence of a cultural discourse that values performance and sporting achievement. These social and cultural discourses provide multiple lenses through which ultrarunners' running identities are formed, albeit in a fluid and transformational way. When injured, these processes interact and inform the athlete about how to respond. Medical discourse exists alongside these other discourses and often becomes dominant possibly because it promises a return to running or "health". However, neglecting to understand the subjective and complex experiences of the injured runner may have a detrimental impact on their healing journey. As these athletes surrender their own narrative and submit to medical discourse, their experience of dis-embodiment is possibly amplified. This may increase anxiety and even a premature return to running (and possibly further injury), as they engage with a medically-driven-restitution narrative.

2.9 Conclusions

This paper has provided an alternative framework for understanding injury in ultra-runners. It is one which centres the embodied and subjective experiences of the injured athlete, hence resisting the positivism of medical discourse. When an ultra-runner experiences pain or injury, they experience a disruption to their corporeal identity as their body is experienced in an unfamiliar way. The body is discursively (re)constructed through a multitude of discourses. The dominance of dualistic medical approaches to injury perpetuates a dis-embodied experience for these athletes forcing them to position themselves within a discourse comprising a number of unhelpful dualisms (Crossley, 1995), which is a stark contrast to the subjective and possibly liminal experience of the injured runner. By resisting these discourses and centring their own embodied experience, ultra-runners may have the opportunity to engage in a transformative narrative, as suggested by long-distance runners Allen Collinson and Hockey (2007). Ultra-running is a sport which has seen a dramatic increase in popularity over recent years (Sheer, 2019), yet research about these athletes, particularly how they experience injury is still in its infancy. By referring to theories such as Merleau-Ponty's *embodiment* and Foucault's *disciplined body* and *medical gaze*, this paper has provided a framework which seeks to resist (not replace) dominant medical narratives by understanding the multiplicity of discourses that impact the

experiences of these runners. These narratives have been positioned within a theoretical framework which centres their embodied experience. However, further research is needed to explore the *embodied* experiences of ultra-runners and narrative constructions of these to develop richer understandings of the discourses available to them, and whether these align with and/or extend the framework constructed in this paper. The embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners should be explored further by using unique and innovative narrative research methods which centre the experience of the body. Of particular interest is the range of discourses available to ultra-runners, how they simultaneously reproduce and resist these discourses, and in doing so, how they negotiate and construct identities that are sustainable in the context of the struggles that they face when experiencing injury.

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Chapter 3

Embodied experiences of injured endurance runners: A qualitative meta-synthesis

3.1 Chapter overview

The previous chapter concluded that further research is needed to explore the embodied experiences of ultra-runners through narrative construction in order to develop a richer understanding of the discourses available to these athletes. While the first study was designed to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the injury experiences of ultra-runners from an embodied perspective, this chapter aims to identify and synthesise existing narrative studies with injured ultra-runners. This chapter comprises a published manuscript entitled: *Embodied experiences of injured endurance runners: A qualitative meta-synthesis*. This study involved a hermeneutic analysis of ten interview studies using meta-ethnography. These interview studies were synthesised and translated before being interpreted through an embodied framework. This theoretical interpretation of themes resulted in the identification of four taxonomies to describe embodied experience: The disciplined body, embodied distress, corporeal running identity and embodied coping. This study provided rich insight into how endurance runners may make sense of their injury experience from an embodied perspective. However it highlights that future research that centres the body, by drawing on methods that enable exploration of embodied experience is required.

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3.2 Abstract

A meta-synthesis was conducted to explore the experiences of ultra-runners who had sustained a running related injury. We identified 10 narrative studies which were synthesised thematically before being re-organised within an Embodiment framework producing 5 taxonomies; The Disciplined Body, Embodied Distress, Corporeal Running Identity, Intersubjectivity of Pain and Embodied Coping. Ultra-running is a body centred activity exemplifying Merleau-Ponty's embodiment. These runners develop a heightened kinaesthetic awareness and embodied sense of space developed through many hours of 'burning in' movement pathways. Running as a habituated and pre-reflective action means that when experiencing injury, the entire world of the ultra-runner is disrupted, calling into question their corporeal identity. Ultra-runners who experience pain or injury may have the opportunity to resist dominant pain narratives by adopting an embodied approach to healing. This meta-synthesis has implications for further research, examining the embodied meaning injured ultra-runners make from injury and how this impacts their experiences of their bodies.

3.3 Introduction

Ultrarunning is considered an extreme form of distance running. Typically, many events involve not only vast distances (over 50 km), but varying altitude and challenging terrain with most ultra-events occurring in mountainous regions with some single trails often over several days. Given the amount of time these athletes spend running, they develop a heightened kinaesthetic awareness of their body as well as an embodied consideration of space (Bale, 2004). This is different to other distance runners, for example marathon runners, who run primarily on roads and footpaths and tend to focus less on bodily spatial awareness and more on internal body systems as feedback to guide performance (Masters and Lambert, 1989; Buman et al., 2008). While we know very little about the discursive construction of the ultra-running body, Hanold (2010), in her research examining female ultra-runners, found that these runners do not point to a specific body type, and instead talked about the ultra-running body as being varied in contrast to long distance (marathon) runners (Hanold, 2010). The emphasis is on what the body *can do* rather than what it looks like. This represents a resistance to more traditional discursive constructions of the distance running body, which focus on the lean and muscular running body (Hockey, 2005; Hanold, 2010). Instead the focus is on the body as subject, deriving meaning from experience rather than physical appearance. This also provides a socio-cultural context for the kinaesthetic and spatial awareness experienced by ultra-runners, developed over many hours of running producing bodies that are at times resistant to dominant running narratives.

Ultra-running specifically has seen a rapid rise in popularity over recent years, with data from the International Association of Ultrarunners stating a participation increase of 345% in 10 years. This is a much higher growth rate than marathons, and also higher than other ultra-endurance events (Sheer, 2019). As such, the sport of ultrarunning provides researchers with a relevant and timely opportunity to better understand the embodied experiences of these extreme athletes, as well as opportunities to compare and contrast these experiences with other long-distance runners. For this reason, both long distance and ultra-running research articles are included in this study, with a particular focus on the embodied experiences of ultra-runners in order to contribute to the knowledge base of this rapidly growing sport. Of additional interest also, is whether there exists a difference in how these two groups of runners both reproduce and resist the many discourses that exist about running and injury.

The body in an *embodied sense*, reflecting the athletes corporeal experiences of their body, is a topic identified by Allen Collinson (2011) as lacking in the research, despite historical arguments about the importance of bringing the body ‘back’ into sport research (Turner, 1984). Embodiment is a concept that dissolves the distinction between body and mind, recognising that knowledge is embedded in embodied practices (Lisahunter, 2016), and all human experience is mediated via the body and the senses (Sunderland et al. 2012). With this in mind, Allen-Collinson and Leledaki (2015) in their research explored the visual and haptic experiences of outdoor exercise. They suggest that these experiences contribute to an intense embodiment, a high level of conscious awareness of the body. The way in which distance runners engage sensorially has also been explored by Allen Collinson and Hockey (2015) where they acknowledge the interrelatedness and multimodality of lived experience. They describe a subcultural distance running ‘vision’, developed and refined over time and place which becomes incorporated into their running bodies.

Given the fact that ultra-runners run through mountainous terrain and single trails for many hours, the sensorial corporeality of their experience is suggestive of an intense embodiment whereby running is experienced in a pre-reflective way without conscious awareness. However, when an ultra-runner experiences pain the body can become the object of intentionality, or as Leder (1990) describes in a state of dys-appearance. According to their research involving long-distance runners, this experience can occur when runners experience the haptic discomforts of cold and rain (Allen Collinson and Leledaki, 2015), or pain and discomfort (Lev, 2020). Recent research on how long-distance swimmers experience pain describes how pain is contextually situated, and that ‘good’ pain is accepted for these endurance athletes as part of their embodied ‘doing’ (McNarry, Allen-Collinson, and Evans, 2020). What this suggests, is that part of the endurance discourse and experience of being-in-the-world for endurance athletes, reframes Leder’s body dys-appearance in a less negative way. Instead, it implies that pain with meaningful purpose is not only accepted, but valued, becoming a core structure of the

lived sporting experience (McNarry, Allen Collinson, and Evans, 2020). Whether these discourses are reproduced or resisted in ultra-running has yet to be explored.

While sporting research has begun to delve into the sensing and corporeal experiences of the lived body; such as in scuba diving (Backstrom, 2014), mountaineering (Allen Collinson, Crust, and Swann, 2018) and walking (Wunderlich, 2008), the majority of research on the sporting body objectifies the body as *object*, filtering it through socio-cultural discourse while neglecting the fleshy and corporeal experiences of athletes. As such, despite the re-emergence of *the body* as a focus in sporting and running research, it continues to remain heavily theorised, detached, distant, and lacking in the intimate connection to the lived experiences of corporeal beings (Sparkes, 1999). The focus is often on what is ‘done’ to the body, externalising the body and positioning it within an array of unhelpful dualisms (Crossley, 1995).

For a corporeally-grounded perspective of ultra-running running bodies, Merleau-Ponty’s existentialist phenomenology is well suited given his interest in embodied consciousness and intentionality (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Allen Collinson, 2011). Meaning is achieved both with and through the senses, within a socio-cultural frame (Merleau-Ponty, 1945), as in the embodied awareness of ultra-runners and the way they experience running through their bodies. While our bodily experiences are always socially and environmentally based, *meaning* is created through involvement in and action in relation to the world (Stelter, 1998). The haptic and visual sensations experienced by runners, including pain, are subjective experiences and as Lev (2020) suggests, deeply rooted in the runner’s peer group socialisation.

Bourdieu elaborates on Merleau-Ponty’s concept of *intentionality*, specifically discursively oriented intentionality, through his discussion of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus refers to a system of internalised schemes of perception, conception and action which forms an embodied generative grammar (Bourdieu 1977; Stelter 1998) which is culturally based. Endurance running involves many hours of ‘burning in’, movement pathways which provide a psychophysical grammar for engagement that is deployed spontaneously via pre-reflective intentionality. Further it is the creative potential of the habitus and its interaction with the social world that either creates struggle and transformation or continuity (Stelter, 1998). For less experienced ultra-runners in particular, running in an event in unfamiliar and challenging terrain, creates a dialectical confrontation between habitus and objective structures. The runner, when faced with this, has the opportunity to transform and adapt, or remain the same. Either way, the ultimate aim is to reduce the anxiety and discomfort associated with the confrontation between habitus and the objective structures.

When it comes to pain and injury in endurance runners, research suggests that pain and injury occupy a prominent place in runners' understandings of themselves, with runners generally expecting pain to be a normal part of their experience (Lev, 2020; Hanold, 2010). In fact, non-injury pain has even been viewed as the 'deposit' or investment through which performance is extracted, holding with it symbolic value (Bale 2004), significantly influenced by the social environment (Lev 2020) As demonstrated by McNarry, Allen-Collinson, and Evans (2020) not all sporting pain is unwelcome, nor is it always associated with injury. The authors suggest a more holistic view of pain acknowledging the multitude of manifestations and meanings associated with pain as a phenomenon.

For long distance runners *endurance* and the concept of 'digging in' is valued over performance (Hockey & Allen Collinson in Bridel, Markula, and Denison, 2016). This is a lived corporeal experience, with the muscles holding their own memory of being tired and fatigued and 'knowing' that they will be able to keep going. For these runners enduring discomfort is routine. The 'enduring' consciousness accumulates the somatic experience of habitual pains, formulates contextual strategies to deal with these and develops confidence in the possibility of further enduring this discomfort (Hockey & Allen-Collinson in Bridel, Markula, and Denison, 2016). With regard to ultra-runners, *endurance* has been less explored, however it has been loosely described as pushing beyond limits and expectations (Jaeschke, et al., 2016). The implication being that these runners do not necessarily endure habitual experiences of pain, but attempt to define their physical limits by pushing through and exceeding physical expectations. Perhaps then for ultra-runners, they develop confidence in formulating contextual strategies to deal with the possibility of future 'unknown' discomforts. However, if discomfort impairs their running, even causing them to stop, the disrupted immediacy that results can in fact contribute to the entire world of the athlete shifting. Its unfamiliarity grabs the runner's attention in an unpredictable and uncontrollable way, and in doing so it reorganises lived space and time as well as how they relate to themselves and others (Leder, 1990).

Accessing long distance and ultra-runners' experiences of their bodies requires the use of qualitative methods of inquiry. As a sport which has seen a significant rise in popularity over the past 10–15 years (Sheer, 2019), there is very little research which explores the embodied experiences of ultra-runners in particular. and. In this research we synthesise existing interview studies which examine the experiences of both long distance and ultra-runners who have experienced pain or injury. Although the focus of this research is ultra-running, we included both groups of endurance runners for two reasons. Firstly, to better understand the nuances between these athletes and their corporeal experiences, and secondly, to contribute to the development of an embodied understanding of injury for endurance runners which can then be tested by future qualitative research studies. By analysing the narratives of endurance runners through the development of first and second-order themes, we reorganised these experiences, filtering them through an embodiment framework and creating new ways of

understanding long distance and ultra-runners' meaning making processes and their embodied experiences of pain and injury. This information could improve and enhance how researchers and clinicians collaborate with injured endurance athletes through the rehabilitation process.

3.4 Method

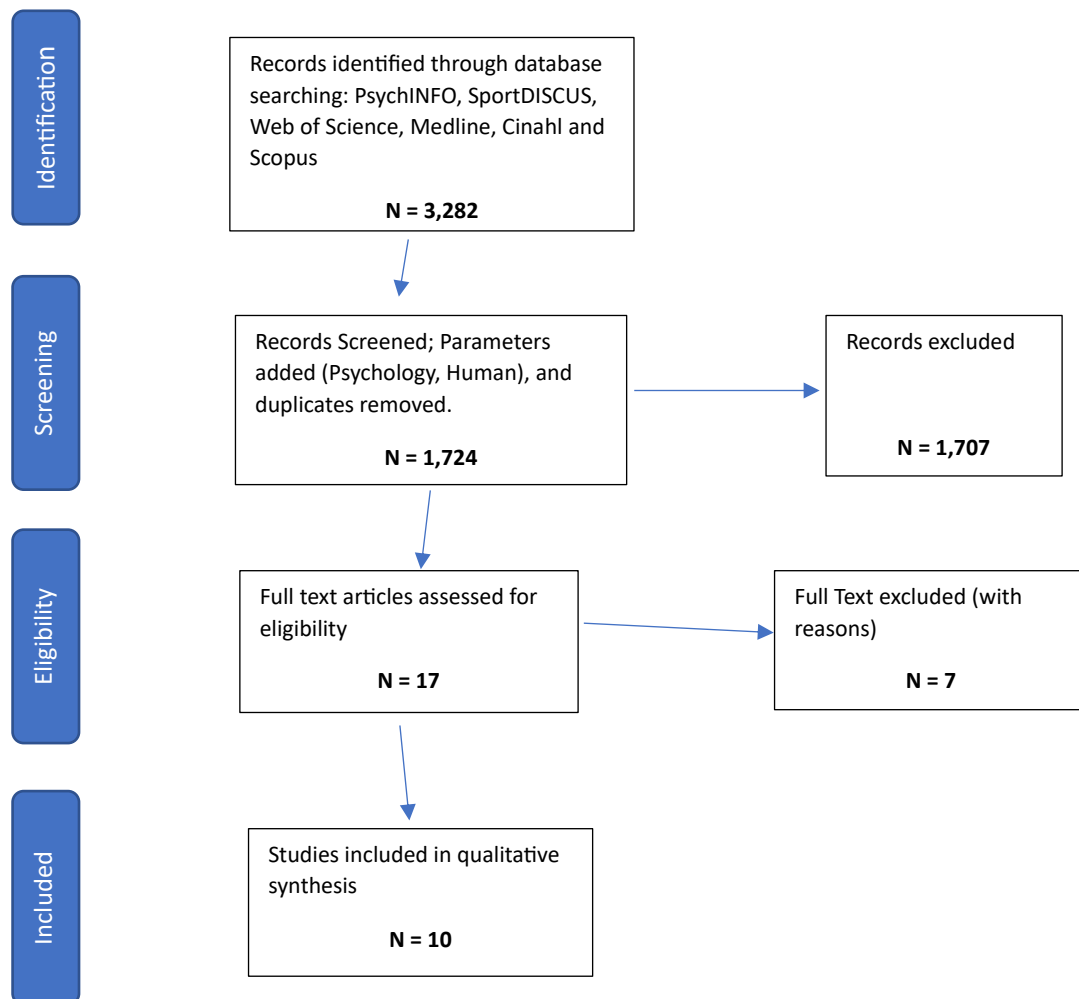
Search Strategy

A systematic search of the literature was conducted using an electronic database search of PsychINFO, SportDISCUS, Web of Science, Medline, Cinahl and Scopus. A search containing key words and MeSH headings using Boolean AND/OR operators on ultra-running, endurance running, long distance running, injury and/or pain yielded 3,282 documents. Parameters relevant to each database were used without limiting search terms (e.g. human, psychology).

Selection of studies/participants

Purposive sampling techniques were used to reflect participants that met the objectives of the study. Runner's ages ranged from 19 to 66 years, with 62% male. Four documents represented findings from the same two collaborative auto-ethnographers. All were long distance and/or ultra-runners. Research parameters included the narratives of long-distance runners as well as ultra-runners in order to maximise findings, contribute to the literature on endurance running and also to identify any differences that may exist in how these runners experience their injured bodies. The type and extent of pain and injuries experienced by runners ranged from micro-trauma injuries, skin laceration and orthopaedic injury (knee), cumulative disruption in body functioning and associated pain leading to race withdrawal, cramping and gastrointestinal pain/problems, also leading to race withdrawal. All were from middle-class Western or European countries; Canada USA, Switzerland, UK. The studies were identified, screened for eligibility and selected for inclusion following the PRISMA flow chart (Moher et al. 2009) (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



The initial 3,282 documents were screened for duplicates. Following this, parameters were added (e.g. human, psychology) to exclude documents that did not fit the purpose of this meta-synthesis while not limiting the content parameters. 1,724 were identified. Documents were then screened to include only qualitative studies. This was achieved by a manual title and abstract search. Of the 17 qualitative studies selected, 7 were excluded because they did not fit the purpose of this study. For example; they were not original research articles, and/or runners were not reporting their experiences about a recent or current injury. A total of 10 documents were selected for inclusion (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Included Studies

Title	Author/Year/Country	Study Question/s	Participant characteristics	Method/Design
1. Narratives of Psychosocial Response to Micro-trauma injury among Long Distance Runners.	Russell, Wiese-Bjornstal (2015). USA, Midwest	What psychosocial responses do long-distance runners experience surrounding a micro-trauma injury?	8 females, 2 males 19-37yrs (m = 25.1).	Thematic Analysis
2. Running into injury time: Distance running and temporality	Collinson (2003), United Kingdom	Examining the socio-temporal dimension of sporting injury.	1 male, 1 female middle aged, amateur long distance runners	Collaborative Ethnography
3. Injured distance runners: A case study of identity work as self-help.	Hockey (2005), United Kingdom	The importance of identity work in the maintenance of 2 runners' athletic identity in the face of prolonged injury	1 male, 1 female middle aged, amateur long distance runners	Collaborative Ethnography
4. Emotions, interaction and the injured sporting body	Collinson (2005), United Kingdom	Exploring the emotional dimension on the injured sporting (runners) body.	1 male, 1 female middle aged, amateur long distance runners	Collaborative Ethnography
5. "Working out" identity: Distance runners and the management of disrupted identity	Collinson & Hockey (2007), United Kingdom	Exploring the role of "identity work"	1 male, 1 female middle aged, amateur long distance runners	Collaborative Ethnography
6. Pain on the run: Injury, pain and performance in a distance runner	Heil (2012), USA Virginia	Description of an experience of running injury including biological, social and psychological factors	1 male, 20yrs. Distance runner.	Case Study
7. The story of withdrawals during an ultra-trail running race. A qualitative investigation of runner's courses of experience.	Philipe, Rochat, Vauthier, Hauw (2016), Switzerland Lausanne	What are the representative sequences (meaningful experiences) of 2 runners race withdrawals	8 male, 2 female long distance runners. 19-54yrs (m = 38.8)	Sequencing events using Elementary Units of Meaning (EUMs), and open ended interviews.
8. Exploring experiences of running an ultramarathon	Holt, Lee, Kim, Klein (2014). USA Alberta	Exploring experiences of 8 runners competing in the 2012 Canadian Death Race (125km)	5 male, 1 female. 23-66yrs (m = 46.1)	Pre-race interviews, during race audio/video recordings and post-race written essays and focus groups.
9. Experiences and coping responses of "hitting the wall" for recreational marathon runners.	Buman, Omli, Giacobbi, Brewer (2008). USA Florida	Understanding the phenomenological meaning and processes of "hitting the wall".	40 males, 17 females. 24-66yrs (m = 41.8).	Online survey with open ended text boxes.
10. It's not about taking the easy road": The experiences of ultramarathon runners.	Simpson, Post, Young, Jensen (2014). USA Florida.	Phenomenological interviews with 26 ultramarathon runners	19 males, 7 females. 32-67yrs (m = 44.1).	Phenomenological interviews

Critical appraisal

The study adopted several strategies to optimise validity. The second author was involved in the screening of documents. The third author possesses experience in meta-synthesis and was involved in assisting the first author in the assessment of selected documents. The second author provided assistance in the form of iterative discussion and dialogue with regard to the final selection and appraisal of documents.

The final documents selected for inclusion were then critically appraised based on the detailed outline formulated by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007). This study did not employ a quality appraisal rubric or metric due to a lack of agreement about what constitutes a ‘good’ qualitative study (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2007), as well as the implied subjectivity and inconsistencies associated with existing metrics (Cooper, 2017). Given that the study aims were to explore the *experiences* of injured runners, it was also felt by the authors that employing a subjective metric would introduce a potential bias which could dilute the narratives.

Meta-synthesis

Meta-synthesis attempts to integrate results from a number of different but related qualitative studies. It has an interpretative intent, and as opposed to quantitative meta-analysis which aims to increase certainty in cause and effect, it is largely hermeneutic, seeking to both understand and explain phenomena (Walsh and Downe, 2005).

The content from all 10 articles was initially synthesised and interpreted using meta-ethnography (Noblit and Hare, 1988) in order to preserve the original intention and meaning of experiences. The synthesis involved the following stages;

(1) Line by line reading of each study. The relationships between the studies was synthesised through juxtaposing a list of key metaphors, phrases and ideas (and their relations). A list of first-order themes was created.

(2) The studies were translated into one another. This is an iterative process, maintaining the central metaphors/concepts in each account while comparing them across other accounts, creating a list of second-order themes (Table 3.2).

(3) The translations were synthesised through an embodiment framework while maintaining (and respecting) the original meanings. Themes were interpreted and compared with each other, conceptual relationships were identified, resulting in a higher and more sophisticated level of abstraction and interpretation (Tweed and Charmaz in Harper and Thompson 2012).

(4) These were developed into four taxonomies.

(a) The Disciplined Body

(b) Embodied Distress

- (c)Corporeal running identity
- (d)Embodied Coping

Table 3.2. First and Second Order Themes

First Order Themes	Second-Order Themes	Paper Origin
Identity	a) Disruption of running identity b) Identity re-storying c) Maintaining Running Identity d) Formulation of Running Identity	Hockey (2005); Collinson & Hockey (2007) Hockey (2005); Collinson & Hockey (2007) Hockey (2005); Collinson & Hockey (2007) Hockey (2005); Collinson & Hockey (2007)
Emotional Response	a) Mediated by injury type b) Spectrum of emotions c) Emotional inter-subjectivity	Russell, Weise-Bjornstal (2015) Russell, Weise-Bjornstal (2015); Collinson (2005) Collinson (2005)
Coping	a) Pain/discomfort as a stressor b) Cognitive and behavioural coping c) Social support d) Race withdrawal	Holt, Lee et al (2014) Buman et al (2008); Holt, Lee et al (2014); Phillipe et al (2016) Simpson et al (2014); Holt, Lee et al (2014) Phillipe et al (2016)
Subjectivity of experience	a) Influenced by setting and others b) Temporal complexity c) Meaning determines response d) Interaction between physiological, behavioural, cognitive, affective and motivational.	Phillipe et al (2016) Collinson (2003) Russell, Weise-Bjornstal (2015) Heil (2012)
Sociocultural factors	a) Symbolic Interactionism and identity b) Meaning influenced by others	Collinson & Hockey (2007) Heil (2012)

The aim of a theoretical interpretation of themes, as opposed to a thematic synthesis, is to produce an inductively driven theory of process grounded in the material from which it is derived, hence resembling a grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As such, the analysis not only aims to understand the *experiences* of injured runners from a phenomenological perspective, it also aims to produce an embodied theory of injury and rehabilitation for ultra-runners, which is grounded in their own expressed experiences.

3.5 Results

Running Identity

Long distance and ultra-runners embody their running identity. In terms of what constitutes a running identity, Hockey (2005) demonstrates how he and his colleague constructed their athletic running identity based on the attributes they perceived as central to the role of distance runner. Specifically, they perceived their athletic selves as possessing a number of qualities such as physical endurance, stoicism, competitiveness, agility and lean and strong bodies (Hockey, 2005). Their perception of these attributes, they identify as being discursively mediated over years of participating and interacting with the long-distance running culture.

With regard to ultra-runners, their running identity appears to be discursively constructed a little differently. With less focus on physical attributes, the endurance discourse is reproduced in the way these athletes respond to pain and discomfort. For example, withdrawing from a running event is something that these runners will avoid where possible, in part due to their desire to remain true to their running identity. According to Lev (2020) there is a performative element to pain for endurance runners, which reinforces their running identities. For ultra-runners this is taken to an extreme, with a ‘pushing beyond limits’ narrative that separates them from other endurance athletes (Simpson et al. 2014). According to several of the ultra-runners interviewed by Simpson et al. (2014), the experience ‘*separates you from the rest of the world*’ (p. 179). For those runners who make the decision to withdraw from a race, the decision is often reconciled by focussing on their running future (Philippe et al., 2016). In other words, maintaining their ultra-running identity by ensuring their running future becomes a priority.

While the experience of pain for endurance runners can be instrumentalised to strengthen their running identity (Lev, 2020), for ultra-runners it reinforces their sense of belonging to an exclusive group of runners (Simpson et al., 2014), injury represents a disruption in running identity. While some research suggests that runners submit to the discursive construction of running identity by focussing on ways to maintain their running bodies when injured through other forms of physical training (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015), other research suggests a resistance to this with injured runners re-storying their identity resulting in a transcendence of self and a more compassionate stance towards their embodied selves (Hockey 2005).

This is consistent with research that suggests we experience a multiplicity of body images, a reflexive identity constructed through a series of corporeal exchanges that take place within and outside our bodies (Weiss, 1999). The process of re-storying identity appears to develop through a series of corporeal exchanges occurring both within and outside their bodies, suggesting that running ‘identity’

is formed through a series of overlapping and internalised images. Allen Collinson (2005) refers to the liminality that comes from a state of being injured, and the ambiguity associated with being between a previous status and a new one yet to be defined. During this time, the runner is perhaps processing these internalised images until they are able to reconcile and adjust these images to their new state of being.

Through injury, Hockey and his colleague respond to their body by shifting the most salient aspects of their corporeal identity from one of performance-based running, to embodied self-compassion. He relates this experience to the subjective and reflexive identity grounded in self-feelings, or *Felt Identity* according to Goffman (Goffman, 1963). The self is reflexive in that we have the ability to view oneself as 'other' via an internal dialogue of thinking as well as internalise wider social attitudes that constitute the generalised 'other' (Hockey, 2005). The result is the ability to re-story identity by embodying multiple body subjectivities. This process also allows for other dominant social and political discourses to be resisted, such as the medical discourse. The medical gaze is a powerful discourse which can result in bodies being subjugated (Foucault, 1994). This process often befalls the injured runner who seeks medical advice. Re-storying provides an opportunity for injured runners to resist this by centring their own narrative about their experience.

Other runners work hard to maintain their running identity by submitting to dominant running body narratives. Russell and Weise-Bjornstal (2015), found that injured long-distance runners minimised their distress by cross-training, with several runners stating the importance of maintaining their fit bodies and feeling 'in control' of their fitness despite being injured and unable to run. This coping response ensures an adherence to the power of running as a discipline with the body as the focal point. While for some runners, injury is resisted as the athlete relies on a restitution narrative about the body being restored to its pre-running state (Frank 2013; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal 2015), others see it as opportunity to resist this discourse, instead seeing it as an opportunity to transform and adapt by developing a more compassionate stance towards their running bodies (Hockey, 2005). Given that Hockey and Allen-Collinson's research focusses on long-distance runners and not ultra-runners, it is not possible at this stage to extrapolate these findings to ultra-runners without further research.

Emotional response to pain and injury

When a runner experiences an injury, they inevitably experience a level of distress which is an interaction between multiple internal and external systems. These emotions involve a cascading of events with somatosensory and motor resources recruited at multiple time points in perception, understanding and experience (Winkielman, Coulson, and Niedenthal, 2018). Research supports this in identifying that injured endurance runners progress through identified 'stages' of emotional

experience which are dependent on external and internal factors (Allen-Collinson 2005; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal 2015; Buman et al., 2008).

Pain in particular is a central feature of the achievement configuration of running (Bale, in Loland, Skirstad, and Waddington, 2006). For long-distance runners, an acute injury can trigger an all-consuming pain experience. According to Allen Collinson at the time of her running-related injury; *'My left knee is screaming for attention, as if it's all of me'* (Allen Collinson, 2003, p. 340). This highlights the arresting nature of an acute injury. It dramatically changes the world of the runner. The fear and anxiety that results, relates to concerns about the meaning of the pain/injury and the consequences. When they experience pain, it appears that runners engage in an immediate search for meaning, linking the experience to different elements taken from the particular situation; such as the physical environment, weather, equipment, or health (Philippe et al., 2016). By perceiving the pain and associated body part as 'other', the runner is also able to see it as an enemy to fight and overcome (Lev 2020). However, engaging in this process creates a form of embodied resistance to the experience of pain itself. Addison et al. (Addison, et al., 1998) suggests that this immediate appraisal and search for meaning is about determining the type of pain experienced. Specifically, is the pain positive pain (associated with training), fatigue/discomfort or negative pain? (Addison et al., 1998). Once again, focusing on cognitive interpretations of an experience which is also intrinsically affective and socially (re)produced.

For ultra-runners, putting meaning to pain becomes an immediate priority, with many runners continuing to run in order to assess and figure out either the cause, and/or the consequence of the pain or injury. *'I started to have bad sensations in the legs, like a burning sensation and tingling toes. I told myself that it wasn't good but I carried on at the same time'* (Philippe et al., 2016, p. 365). Other runners engage in calculated experiments to see if the pain experience changes at all. *'I was dragging myself along, with a pain behind my knee. So I tried to slow down to see if it would stop'* (Philippe et al., 2016, p. 367). These examples highlight the corporeal nature of their responses to pain.

While there is suggestion that the spectrum of emotions experienced by an injured runner depends on the type of injury (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015), and the temporal aspects relating to the initial pain experience through to injury stabilisation (Heil, 2012), others suggest that to fully understand the emotional experiences of these athletes, it's important to consider these experiences in an interactional context by taking into account the social dimension and subjectivity of the experience (Allen Collinson, 2005; Lev, 2020). For example, feeling supported by others (and each other) in the running community had a profound impact on the emotional subjectivities of Hockey and Allen Collinson (Allen Collinson, 2005). Similarly, Holt et al. (2014) stated in their findings that social support helped runners emotionally cope with the demands of an ultra-running race, while one experienced ultra-

runner stated that the importance of the ultra-running community is *'really the most important part of the whole thing'*. (Simpson et al., 2014, p. 179).

Coping

Pain is a multi-dimensional subjective experience, which depends on a number of individual factors (Roessler in Loland, Skirstad, and Waddington, 2006). While ultra-runners almost always expect some pain, pain motivates these athletes to act or respond in some way. Philippe et al. (2016) suggest that the onset of pain can be a trigger for withdrawing from an ultra-marathon event, however it appears as though these runners experience cumulative stressors; culminating in a perceived lack of control over their symptoms and/or worsening of pain. As such, it is not so much the perception of pain, rather the experience of not being in control and experiencing their body in an unfamiliar way. This is supported by Simpson et al. (2014) with one runner stating; *'Once you've accepted pain your threshold I think is automatically increased so you learn to just tolerate it. As long as it doesn't go beyond what you come to expect or accept as reasonable, then you're ok'* (Simpson et al., 2014, p. 181). This particular statement highlights the importance these athletes place on body *familiarity*. Once the pain causes the body to feel unfamiliar, attributing meaning to the pain experience becomes extremely difficult and the emotional consequence can be confronting. This is when fear and anxiety begin to dominate the runner's experience, fear of not recovering, of diminished performance (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015; Allen Collinson, 2003) or of being thought of as 'weak' (Philippe et al., 2016; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015). They become alienated from their own body. This would explain Allen Collinson's response to her knee pain; fear of its consequences and a threat of loss experienced as an inability to run. Her pain shifted her subjectivity, revealing a desire for meaning (Allen Collinson, 2005). By externalising the affected body part, Allen Collinson was also able to distance herself from the emotional consequences associated with not knowing whether she would be able to run again.

According to Heil (2012), his immediate strategy to cope with pain during a running event was to simply continue running. By maintaining a corporeal focus on running, Heil appears to disengage from any *conscious* decision making process in response to his pain experience. Instead, he returns to habituated action, focusing on the hypnotic rhythm of movement to help him cope with his pain. This same strategy was used by the ultra-runners interviewed by Simpson et al. (2014). *'Become so focussed on the run, that you forget the pain'*. (p. 181). In Philippe et al. (2016), ultra-runners respond and cope with pain and discomfort by modifying and adjusting their running style. Once again, these runners cope with their pain with a corporeal immediacy produced by an intricate awareness of their body. Their body responds instinctively almost of its own accord in response to pain and discomfort until it finds a way of alleviating discomfort.

Masters and Lambert (1989) suggest that elite long-distance runners typically *associate* with pain, which has been supported by the conclusions made by Philippe et al. (2016) in their interviews with ultra-runners. Recognising the dualistic simplicity inherent in Masters and Lambert's model, Brick, MacIntyre, and Campbell (2014) suggest a different model, one which recognises the importance of an *active* dimension of coping including active self-regulation of technique. This was also reflected in the ultra-runner's narratives, responding to discomfort by adjusting their running style (Philippe et al., 2016). Other ultra-runners when experiencing pain during an event describe a form of active distraction (Brick, MacIntyre, and Campbell, 2014) by focusing on the mechanics of putting one foot in front of the other. This strategy is used as a way of creating a rhythm whereby the pain is 'forgotten' (Simpson et al., 2014). These types of strategies have been suggested to unintentionally stimulate a self-regulatory focus on cadence rather than distract or 'dissociate' from discomfort until it finds a way of alleviating discomfort.

While this resists notions of pain dissociation, it also resembles a cognitive reaction to the affective and lived experience aspect of pain. One which avoids the fear and anxiety of embodied experience, by selectively attending to what the runner can control.

The type of pain that signals an injury, is an experience which shifts the endurance runners subjectivity triggering a state of liminality (Allen Collinson, 2005). When it comes to injury, ultra-runners develop coping strategies for situations that they label as stressors, often experienced in a cumulative manner (Philippe et al., 2016). With regard to distance runners however, Russell and Weise-Bjornstal (2015) suggest that runners develop a core narrative which describes the injury, and an evaluative commentary which gives meaning to the injury process. Buman et al. (2008) refers to this same process as a secondary appraisal, which is demonstrated by Allen Collinson's response to her arresting knee injury (Allen Collinson, 2003). While both long distance and ultra-runners organise their experiences around assigning meaning to their injury experience, the research suggests that distance runners appear to utilise cognitive regulation strategies aimed at protecting the runner from the potential impact of the injury on performance (Buman et al., 2008). According to Philippe et al. (2016), ultra-runners describe a less cognitive, more embodied way of moving through the pain experience by responding to an intricate awareness of, and trust in, their body (Philippe et al., 2016). Social support appears to be a critical component relating to how well a runner responds and copes with pain associated with injury. Ultra-runners experience a strong sense of camaraderie within the ultra-running subculture (Bridel, Markula, and Denison, 2016), with many ultra-runners viewing support, common bonds and camaraderie as integral aspects of the ultra-running experience (Simpson et al. 2014). As such, it comes as no surprise that social and peer support enables injured runners to cope better during injury. While Buman et al. (2008) refer to social support as a way that some long-distance runners cope with hitting the wall, Holt et al. (2014) conclude that a sense of support and camaraderie may be an important coping strategy for ultra-runners when experiencing pain. They also

refer to coping as a complex process, encompassing the appraisal of stressors, emotions and coping. Philippe et al. (2016) describe how runners can ‘*harness the positive influence of other runners*’ (369), unconsciously delaying the decision for suffering runners to withdraw from an ultra-running event. Hockey and Allen Collinson also describe the benefits associated with being able to support each other throughout their rehabilitation journey as long-distance runners, in maintaining their running identities and providing emotional validation and reassurance to each other (Hockey, 2005). Simpson et al. (2014) in their research identified the relative importance of support crews and volunteers as being an integral part of the ultra-running community, extending the idea of social support from other like-minded runners to other members of the running community. Lev (2020) refers to the performative element of the pain experience, in particular how the social context shapes how pain is expressed. He notes how runners can perform and manage their running impression in front of a large audience. This suggests that when injured, runners can demonstrate agency in how they curate their injury-related responses in front of others. This allows them to either reproduce or resist the many discourses that help shape their experiences.

The ultra-running discourse is one of endurance as opposed to performance, at least for the vast majority of runners. Unlike other runners who value finish times and podium results, most ultra-runners value the sense of achievement that comes from crossing the finish line (Holt et al. 2014; Philippe et al., 2016). The finish line, represents the completion of a long and arduous journey requiring significant embodied endurance. As such, the decision to withdraw from an ultra-running event is a difficult one. It involves a process of cumulative subjective stressors organised around and based on body awareness (Philippe et al., 2016). Holt et al. (2014) describe that for some runners while it is acceptable to be ‘timed out’ of an event, or even to collapse, quitting a race is viewed with disdain. Even thoughts about quitting a race represent a significant stressor for many ultra-runners (Holt et al. 2014; Philippe et al., 2016). As such, the endurance discourse is continually reproduced through the way in which ultra-runners respond to pain and injury during an ultra-running event. This is either through using techniques aimed at pushing through pain and discomfort, or by deciding to withdraw only after experiencing *multiple* stressors. What this suggests, is that for ultra-runners the way they respond and cope with pain is influenced by a multitude of internal and external factors, and whether their pain experience causes their body to become unfamiliar.

Subjectivity of experience

For injured athletes, linear time is generally regarded as the main marker of progress through their rehabilitation and healing journey. This was experienced by Allen-Collinson (2003), however she also discusses the concept of temporal extension during her rehabilitation journey. She describes a ‘time tube’ phenomenon whereby time slows and extends during times of acute pain and suffering associated with injury. During these times, she and her injured running colleague describe feeling

overwhelmed once again by trepidation and fear that the reactivated pain was not mere soreness but constituted a major breakdown of mechanical functioning, threatening rehabilitation (Allen Collinson, 2003, p. 340). However during times where the body is experienced as relatively pain free, and running is pleasurable, temporal restriction occurs where time feels like it is closing in on itself (Allen Collinson, 2003). As such, during their rehabilitation, Allen Collinson and Hockey describe what Flaherty (1999) describes as protracted duration, temporal compression, and synchronicity to illustrate the continuum of temporal perception.

In their research about the experiences of ultra-runners, Philippe et al. (2016) identify temporal extension occurring when these athletes experience pain during an ultra-running event; “ . . . *I looked at my watch and realized that I’d only done one kilometre in two hours*” (Philippe et al., 2016, p. 367). As such, it appears that for both long-distance runners and ultra-runners, the continuum of temporal restriction is experienced when in pain and when injured. These moments appear to be marked by a consuming focus on body mechanics and a need to put meaning to their experience.

Masters and Lambert (1989) conclude that it is the motivation or the meaning associated with running which determines how a long-distance runner responds and copes with pain or discomfort. Extending beyond the simplicity of their framework, this subjectivity of experience for ultra-runners represents a combination of factors filtered through socio-cultural discourse. With regard to pain specifically, although a personal and subjective experience, the social environment has a powerful impact on the body in pain (Lev 2020), which was reinforced by the narratives of ultra-runners in this study (Simpson et al. 2014; Philippe et al., 2016). This demonstrates that lived experience is grounded and negotiated in shared interactional practices and as part of the ultra-running world (Lev, 2020). Many ultra-runners derive meaning through endurance narratives and the achievement that comes from completing an ultra-marathon, as opposed to performance and run times (Simpson et al., 2014; Holt et al., 2014). While the aim of attenuating discomfort may be the same for both long distance runners and ultra-runners, the latter appear to use different coping strategies which focus on body familiarity, the knowledge and trust they have in their body and how it responds, and a confidence that they can cope if the situation/pain escalates (Simpson et al., 2014) Long-distance runners appear to engage in active distraction techniques which allow them to endure existing discomfort. Where this becomes a problem, triggering stress and a fear of being unable to continue running, is when these runners are unable to put meaning to the experience causing their body to become unfamiliar (Philippe et al., 2016). It’s during these times that the body emerges as an alien presence, causing runners to engage in first person body alienation resisting the parts of the body that are causing pain (Lev, 2020).

Sociocultural factors

In their discussion about the impact of injury on running identity, Hockey and Allen Collinson filter their discussion through a symbolic interactionist perspective, meaning that identity is an active and self-reflective entity (Hockey, 2005). In this context, the self is not static, but a dynamic interplay between the self, and others. An runner's identity is a discursive process which reproduces middle class notions of mental toughness and endurance. As such, injured runners work hard to maintain their running identity by employing narratives which validate their membership to the distance running community despite being unable to run (Allen Collinson and Hockey, 2007; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015).

These social processes also shape the meaning that these athletes make from injury, with many runners preferring to seek help and advice from other runners as opposed to the medical profession (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015; Hockey, 2005; Allen Collinson, 2005; Allen Collinson and Hockey, 2007). Given the relative exclusivity of ultra-running and the perception within the sport that only other ultra-runners really 'understand' (Simpson et al., 2014), injury for these extreme athletes is an experience that many feel the general medical profession does not understand. There is potentially also a fear that the familiar dualistic notions inherent within the medical profession in combination with the medical gaze of health professionals will result in injured runners being told that they are overdoing it, and should refrain from or reduce their running, something that is feared by many runners (Allen-Collinson 2005; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015). As such, many prefer the advice of other distance runners who understand the meaning of running for these athletes, and can relate to the liminality of injury (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015; Allen Collinson, 2005).

Overall, the research demonstrates various ways that long distance and ultra-runners experience injury and the impact of injury on their multiple embodied subjectivities. While some runners appear to fall into dominant narratives around pain and injury, others exhibit a resistance to these narratives, instead re-storying these subjectivities and producing new ways of being. With regard to ultra-runners specifically, the research is less clear. However, it does seem that for some of these athletes, pain and injury provides an opportunity to fall into dominant narratives around dualism and endurance, demonstrated by the belief that *'it's more of a mental battle than a physical one'* (Simpson et al., 2014, 180). It also appears that ultra-runners exhibit a strong sense of body familiarity, developed over many hours and years of running, producing a habitus and an embodied coping response to pain. The exception to this however, appears when an ultra-runner is unable to put meaning to their pain experience, causing the body to feel alien and unfamiliar.

3.6 Conclusion

This research has contributed to an understanding of how injury is experienced by both long-distance runners and ultra-runners. Given the paucity of research exploring the narratives of injured ultra-runners, the perspectives of long-distance runners was also included to inform an endurance running narrative, while at the same time identifying the nuanced ways these groups of runners differ in their embodied experiences of pain and injury. Results were analysed thematically, providing first and second-order constructs.

Given that the aims of the study were to contribute to an embodied understanding of injury, several taxonomies were developed as a way of re-organising the experiences of these athletes around a theoretical framework, contributing to a unique theory of embodiment and injury for this group of athletes. These taxonomies are; The Disciplined Body, Embodied distress, Corporeal running identity, and Embodied coping.

The disciplined body

This research suggests that injured ultra-runners rely more on embodied corporeal awareness than medical gaze (Philippe et al., 2016; Holt et al., 2014). Disciplined by an endurance discourse, ultra-runners appear to have developed a familiarity with their bodily sensations and experiences resulting in a sophisticated embodiment whereby pain is experienced in an iterative sense as opposed to a single or simple interpretation. When an ultra-runner experiences pain or discomfort, they continue to move their body utilising a number of strategies based on an intimate kinaesthetic and sensory awareness of their body (Philippe et al., 2016; Holt et al., 2014). This corporeal embodiment produces bodies which are resistant to dominant medical dualistic discourse. While distance runners also demonstrate an embodied awareness of pain, ascribing context-dependent meaning to their experiences (Heil, 2012; Bluhm and Ravn, 2021), ultra-runners appear more focused on pushing 'beyond limits' with their injured bodies (Jaeschke et al., 2016) reproducing a type of hero narrative positioning themselves as 'other' within the endurance running community.

The body is central to identity, as self is based on *felt* experiences of the environment (Stelter, 1998), as well as being a medium through which cultural norms are expressed (Budgeon, 2003). This research suggests that the relationship endurance runners have with their body is discursively mediated, as runners live with the constant sense of the body as needing to be fit and strong, and at times in need of improvement (Allen Collinson and Hockey, 2007; Jaeschke et al., 2016)

The disciplining effects of running are perpetuated and reinforced by the equally disciplining effects of the medical system. When a runner becomes injured, they become subject to the gaze of medical

practitioners (Foucault, 1994). Their body is constructed through discourses and practices and through clinical gaze. This disciplinary Power provides guidelines to the patient about how they should understand and experience their body. This experience is particularly influential given the uncertainty, fear and hope that runners bring with them to the medical encounter (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015), and the fact their body has already been subjected to the disciplinary effects of running. In their self-devised rehabilitation programme, Hockey and Allen Collinson (Hockey, 2005) chose to take control of their own recovery, resisting Foucault's notion of the *docile body* which unintentionally becomes caught in the medical gaze. They attempt to challenge the medical discourse through their resistance to face to face appointments, and they embark on a rehabilitation program, with each step of their recovery focusing on the maintenance of their fit running bodies and an eventual return to running. While resisting the face-to-face interaction with medical professionals, Hockey and Allen Collinson draw on the joint medical knowledge they have accumulated during their distance running careers to devise their own rehabilitation program (Hockey, 2005). Foucauldian notions of power relations in western medicine however, refer not just to face-to-face medical interactions, but to the self-regulations individuals engage in because of the internalisation of the medical gaze, where they incorporate it into their understanding of their embodied selves (Foucault, 1994). Medical power relations in this sense are both relational and productive, producing bodies that are disciplined *and* resistant (Lorentzen, 2008).

Embodied distress

When a runner experiences physical distress through pain, discomfort or injury, the experience contains an affective component which sits at the core of the runners subjectivity. This embodied experience gives meaning to the runners distress by recruiting a number of internal and external resources. Merleau-Ponty (1945) argues that even the most basic of perceptions are constituted by an affective experience. *Meaning* is primarily affective, and although movement and affect are not the same, movements (like running) are felt, and our felt/emotional life takes part in how we move (Roald, Levin, and K ppe 2018). The *pre-reflective* component of affect is an operative element at the core of subjectivity (Roald, Levin, and K ppe, 2018). For runners, this refers to their affective and emotional experience that sits at the core of their corporeal subjectivity. This directly impacts running, altering cadence, posture, breathing, stride. Body movements are felt, but the physical and bodily motions of running are informed by this affective experience. An experience that is then disrupted when unfamiliar pain and injury occur. This creates a shift in subjectivity, meaning that the runners corporeal experience is reorganised around their embodied distress. Allen Collinson (2005) refers to an *embodied* form of consciousness. She talks about emotional subjectivity, and the significance of social and cultural interaction in filtering and informing embodied emotional experiences (Allen Collinson, 2005).

Philippe et al. (2016) conclude that race withdrawal is the consequence of a progressively changing course of experience closely related to the unfolding of a series of specific events. Events which gradually funnel the ultra-runner towards an overall experience where withdrawal becomes the only option (Philippe et al., 2016). Their body familiarity appears to mediate their distress response until the point where their body is experienced as unfamiliar. A process which is filtered through an ultra-running endurance discourse.

When a runner experiences an injury, they inevitably experience a level of embodied distress which is an interaction between multiple internal and external systems. These emotions involve a cascading of events with somatosensory and motor resources recruited at multiple time points in perception, understanding and experience (Winkielman, Coulson, and Niedenthal, 2018). Research supports this in identifying that injured endurance runners progress through identified 'stages' of emotional experience which are dependent on external and internal factors (Allen Collinson, 2005; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015; Buman et al., 2008).

The runner's body is an active part of the meaning-making process as it becomes a foundational part of the affective experience. This meaning shifts when the runner experiences pain or injury. The subsequent emotional experiences are often retrospectively described alongside a specific *phase* of physical injury (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015) or cognitive appraisal (Buman et al., 2008). These embodied experiences involve a secondary appraisal, influenced by the meaning that the runner attributes to the pain or injury. For some injured long-distance runners, their secondary appraisal resembles emotional denial and avoidance through regulation strategies aimed at protecting the runner from the potential impact on performance (Buman et al., 2008). For these runners the embodied emotion is detected and felt, and then swiftly avoided through the use of physical and cognitive active distraction techniques (Lev, 2020). For ultra-runners, there is a suggestion that they put immediate distance between their emotional distress and their bodies (Simpson et al., 2014; Jaeschke et al., 2016), by focusing on the habituated action of running itself (Simpson et al., 2014). While this suggests that both long distance and ultra-runners either avoid, distract or dissociate from their distress, pain itself is something that many of these runners are familiar with (Bale, 2004).

Physical pain is an integral part of endurance running (Allen Collinson and Hockey, 2005). Many ultra-runners state that the pain they experience contributes to personal growth, through an increased knowledge and awareness of what their bodies can endure (Holt et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2014). In his research with triathletes, Atkinson (2008) refers to the formation of a 'pain community' with athletes learning to derive pleasure and status from physical suffering. Lev (2020) refers to pain as a shared experience for long-distance runners, and distress as being something that is deeply rooted in distance runners peer group socialisation processes. This suggests that pain in a sporting context is

different to pain encountered in ordinary life and as such has a different ontology (Loland, Skirstad, and Waddington, 2006).

This may explain why these athletes indicate a distrust in the medical system (Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015; Hockey, 2005) where pain is associated with pathology. The experience of pain can shift the experience of the body, in a way that is unfamiliar. This results in the body becoming the object of intentionality. Leder's (1990) description of the body *disappearing* in everyday life, and moving to the back of conscious awareness represents an ontology that may be different in the world of ultra-running where runners appear to maintain an intimate awareness of their body experiences, causing them to be tuned in and aware of each sensory experience including pain. When they experience pain, it's the *unfamiliarity* which grabs the runner's attention as opposed to the pain drawing *attention* to the body. This unfamiliarity comprises an affective component which these athletes seem to try and either reject or avoid, especially ultra-runners, by focusing on the mechanics of running itself (Simpson et al., 2014; Jaeschke et al., 2016). Experience may also be a factor to consider, as novice runners often report unfamiliar symptoms as 'scary', relying on more experienced runners to help shift their perceptions (Lev, 2019), hence restoring their body familiarity. Or it could mean that inexperienced runners have yet to be socialised into the 'pain community' that exists in endurance sport (Atkinson, 2008).

Corporeal running identity

Given that the body is central to identity, discursive constructions of the endurance running 'body' are an important aspect of corporeal identity. For ultra-runners, these constructions appear to challenge those that exist within the broader long distance running community. While Allen Collinson and Hockey (2007/2016) describe in detail their attempts at maintaining their fit running bodies while injured and unable to run, some ultra-runners appear to resist dominant discourse about the 'fit and lean' running body according to Hanold (2010) by focusing more on what the body *can do* rather than how it looks. In this way, the normative running body is destabilised because it is only used to shape what is not an ultra-running body (Hanold, 2010).

These discursive constructions inform how the body is experienced as an object, influenced by the gaze of others through a range of discourses. However, the lived experience of an injured endurance runner extends beyond the body as object. When their corporeal running identity is fractured through pain or injury, it causes a shift in subjectivity. It has been suggested that the experience of pain is a central feature of the long-distance runners identity (Lev, 2020). A social constructivist position states that the endurance runners identity is an interaction between self and others, constituting an intersubjective, dynamic, and ongoing social process (Hockey, 2005). For both long-distance runners and ultra-runners, this ontology is part of what binds them together as a community of like-minded

people (Simpson et al., 2014; Lev, 2020). As such, the liminality that it produced through pain and injury threatens these ties. What this means for the injured endurance runner is that the fear of their world shifting is perhaps just as much about losing the connections they have developed within their respective running communities, and the relative discourses associated with enduring and pushing limits. While most, if not all of the research to date has focused on injured endurance runners who have returned to running, further research is needed to better understand how these injured runners navigate and move through injury while being unable to run.

Embodied coping

Masters and Lambert (1989) conclude that it is the motivation or reason for running which determines how a long-distance runner copes with pain, and using cognitive association leads to faster run times (Masters and Lambert, 1989). This was somewhat supported by Buman et al. (2008) who suggest that elite long-distance runners who aim to increase their performance, use behavioural and cognitive coping strategies in response to pain such as pacing (segmenting) and self-talk. These are conscious strategies which aim to put meaning to the pain experience. This is consistent with suggestions that long-distance runners cope with pain by developing an intimate relationship with pain while at the same time seeking to eliminate it through alienation (Lev, 2020). By utilising a form of active distraction, these runners aim to return their bodies to a familiar state by adapting body strategies in response to pain and discomfort (Lev, 2020).

For ultra-runners, the research findings are less clear. What is suggested is that rather than active distraction which connects the runner with the physical aspects of their pain experience, these runners rely more on techniques which enable them to create distance between their body and the pain experience. As stated by one of the ultra-runners interviewed by Simpson et al. (2014); '*Become so focused on the run that you forget the pain*'. (p. 181).

By focusing more intently on their running, these runners separate themselves from their pain experience (Simpson et al., 2014; Jaeschke et al., 2016).

In Philippe et al. (2016), the ultra-runners they interviewed responded and coped with pain and discomfort by modifying and adjusting their running style. Once again, these runners cope with their pain with a corporeal immediacy. Their body responds instinctively almost of its own accord in response to pain and discomfort until it finds a way of alleviating discomfort. While many of these runners appear to engage with their experience of pain, relying on active distraction techniques informed by a hyper-awareness of their bodies, what seems to be resisted is the affective component of their pain/injury experience. Coping becomes about finding meaning, and utilising their kinaesthetic awareness developed through many hours of 'burning in'. This results in a form of embodied cognition. However, the body as a lived aspect of human experience, and a process in

which the object-body is actively experienced (Lev, 2020), cannot be separated from the affective parts of experience. It seems plausible therefore to suggest that endurance runners use cognition as a way of avoiding embodied distress, hence falling into dualisms which separate the mind and body. This is reflected by the ultra-runners interviewed by Simpson et al. (2014), *'It's more of a mental battle than a physical one.'* (180).

When athletes experience career ending injuries their emotional response is embodied as they move through what has been described as a grief process associated with the loss of being unable to participate in their sport (Brock and Kleiber, 1994). Allen Collinson (2005) describes frustration and anger, at her incapacitated body. Questions such as *'will I be able to run again'* are asked as the runner attempts to put meaning to their experience. Fear, anxiety, hope and disappointment are often then experienced as the injured runner is forced to confront the emotional process that follows (Allen-Collinson 2005; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015). This process is also experienced within an ableist context that mobilises the charitable gaze (Loja et al., 2013), positioning the runner as 'other'. Seeking validation and recognition for these (dis)abled athletes provides an opportunity for resistance, and the potential to transcend their body as they surrender control and adjust to a new way of being (Charmaz, 1995).

Russell and Weise-Bjornstal (2015) identify that a fear of re-injury often plagues runners who have recovered. This requires runners to adapt their training. *'So, I've learned that I have to take it down and then the next sprint workout I can go more at 100%. So that first sprint is only about 85% because otherwise I'll be right back to where I was again'* (166). Their embodied response to pain and discomfort provides a form of resistance to the disembodied clinical gaze of medical professionals (Allen Collinson and Hockey, 2007; Russell and Weise-Bjornstal, 2015). As such, for many runners the challenge is how to integrate their own embodied response to pain and injury with the expertise and sometimes necessary assessment and treatment offered by the medical profession.

Future Research

Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodiment provides a unique insight into the corporeal experiences of ultra-runners. As suggested by Allen Collinson (2011), what is needed is a phenomenological perspective grounded in the carnal and lived experience of the sporting body. While this research has certainly begun to develop within the distance running culture, research about the embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners is still in its infancy.

Ultra-runners have a corporeal understanding of the movement of running that extends far beyond a mechanical explanation, and captures both the intentionality of movement, in addition to the

formulation of *meaning* which emerges through social discourse. When injured, their embodied experiences are faced with a dialectical confrontation, and the resulting liminal state of injury may create significant shifts in the meaning they attribute to their running bodies. This is a concept which requires further investigation.

Qualitative research which explores the embodied experiences of injured endurance runners is the next step for future research. This research should consider the relative discourses that exist within the sport of endurance running. Centering the body and the runner's experience of their body, challenges biomedical discourse by resisting clinical gaze and ensuring that the injured runner maintains their intense embodiment through the injury process and rehabilitation. Exploring the impact of this on healing and recovery, especially for those who are unable to return to running would be an interesting focus of future research.

This research has provided a framework and a theoretical perspective unique to endurance running and injury, offering a starting point for future research. A perspective that centralises corporeal experience from a phenomenological and embodiment perspective according to Merleau- Ponty (1945), providing a path and direction for further research in a sport which continues to increase in global popularity.

3.7 References

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Chapter 4

The embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners: A Body Mapping Study.

4.1 Chapter overview

While the first study focused on the development of a theoretical framework that centres the *embodied* experience of ultra-runners who have experienced injury, Chapter 3 concluded that further research is needed with ultra-runners to capture their corporeal experiences. This chapter comprises a manuscript entitled: *The embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners: A Body Mapping study*. This study involved combining two sets of empirical data with eight ultra-runners who had recently experienced an injury. Interviews were conducted with participants about their running and injury experiences before they were then invited to participate in a body mapping exercise. This involved the co-production of life sized body maps, where their body was traced onto a large sheet of paper. Participants then emplaced their experiences onto their maps using paint, crayons, magazine cut outs, pencils. The two sets of data were then merged into a multi-layered story of embodied experience. Plot lines were delicately woven through the visual and verbal material to give ‘voice’ to the participants shifting subjectivities and embodied experiences. Stories of body-self transformation, *machina carnis* and senescence were identified with several points of divergence occurring between the visual and verbal material. This study highlights the limitations of relying on verbal narratives in enabling access to embodied experience and the ability of arts-based methods to access deeper experiences that are otherwise not accessible through language alone.

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4.2 Abstract

The sport of Ultra-running has seen exponential growth over the past ten years. These athletes attempt to push beyond unknown human limits by running for many hours at a time, often multiple times a week across mountains and trails. While research has begun to consider how injury impacts these athletes, less is known about their subjective embodied experiences. In particular, the discourses they resist and submit to when they experience injury. This study describes the use of body mapping and narrative interviewing as two forms of research inquiry merged together to explore the embodied experiences of eight recently injured ultra-runners. Plot lines were woven through the visual and textual material resulting in three master plots and eight sub plots. Stories of Body Self-transformation, Machina Carnis (the body-as-machine) and senescence (the ageing body) were layered by emplacing images and text onto life-sized body maps creating vibrant artworks. These artworks were analysed alongside narratives of endurance, strength, determination and loss. Through the artworks participants were able to make visible the invisible, with the injury experience providing a window into former ways of being and current experiences of liminality and fear. This study provides insight into the shifting subjectivities of these extreme athletes brought about by pain and injury, and highlights the importance of using power leveling and emancipatory arts based research methods in accessing subjective experience.

4.3 Introduction

Bodies are extraordinary in their strength and fragility. They are a never ending project that can be worked on, rendering them as malleable entities to be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners (Shilling, 2012). Athletic bodies in particular are often experienced as machines to be manipulated, enhanced and transformed (Mills & Dennison, 2018).

In the sport of long distance running, the endurance discourse produces bodies that are disciplined through hard work and unquestioned social norms (Hanold, 2010). Experiences of pain are normalised and at times perceived as a badge of honour with culturally inscribed symbolic value (Bale, 2006). For these runners, bodies exist to be pushed to and beyond their limits (Crust, Nesti and Bond, 2010).

As an ultra-runner Billy Yang is also a film-maker who has interviewed dozens of the world's most accomplished ultra-runners.

“When it’s your time, do you want to leave a well-preserved body, or do you really want to use it? A body with stories that says you’ve pushed it, and at times suffered, and you sought its potential.” Billy Yang, Ultra-Runner and Filmmaker.

Ultra-running involves running distances over 50km, longer than a marathon and often on single trails across mountainous regions. For these runners, endurance and ‘digging in’ is valued over performance (Hockey, Allen Collinson et al in Bridel et al (Eds), 2016). As a sport which has seen participation rates increase by 345% in the past ten years, studies show that in general participants have never been older and pace has never been slower (Run Repeat, 2022). What draws these athletes to the sport is less about speed and finish times, and more about the perceived emotional and spiritual growth that occurs through enduring levels of discomfort (Holt et al, 2014; Simpson et al, 2014).

For injury free ultra-runners, their body is experienced as indelible and unproblematic (Gadow, 1982). The body fades to the background (Leder, 1990), projected outwards through its place of standing allowing transcendence towards a meditative state achieved through *elemental haptics*, involving kinaesthesia, proprioception and balance (Allen Collinson & Leledaki, 2015). An experience also known as ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), where the experience of space and time is lost or distorted. In this state, ultra-runners describe profound states of spirituality and peace leading to the attainment of a sense of unity with the outdoor environment (Simpson et al, 2014). This experience of unity has also been described in a mind-body sense, with runners stating that being in ‘the zone’ or flow feels like they are at one with their body (Jackman et al, 2021).

This meshing of the mind and body creates a consciousness that allows the senses to open up to their surroundings through running. Through motion, the body is experientially in touch with the world in an operational capacity (Koski, 2015). This is in contrast to discursive constructions of space discussed by Lefebvre (1991) which involves a type of cognitive engagement with space and surroundings. These cognitive constructions result in ultra-running spaces being perceived as a challenge for both the mind and body to overcome (Hanold in Bridel et al (Ed), 2016). This serves to further separate the mind from the body, enabling the dualistic notion of ‘mind over body’ where the body is seen as something to be dominated by a tough mindset (Jaeschke et al, 2016). This privileging of the mind over the body is deeply ingrained in Western culture, with Descartes’ philosophy dictating that the mind-self should seek to control its body-property (Ellingson, 2017). Discursive constructions reinforce the endurance discourse and the concept of ‘digging in’ (Hockey & Allen Collinson in Bridel et al (ed), 2016).

Alternatively, according to Merleau-Ponty consciousness contains the bodily experiences of the world, and as such is not just a thinking activity (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Koski, 2015). The current research and associated findings align with an embodied consciousness, and an experience of corporeal being-in-the-world for ultra-runners.

The failing body

The arresting and jarring experience of injury causes a dramatic shift in subjectivity. The body is brought to the foreground (Leder, 1990) causing the runner’s social world to be altered. Previous

states of flow and embodied awareness are brought to a halt, as consciousness snaps back to the body causing an immediate search for meaning. Assuming that bodies are constituted within the specific nexus of culture (Foucault, 1973; Butler, 1989), the injury experience is filtered through discourses. Research suggests that dominant discourses of endurance and normalisation of pain lead injured runners to *resist* medical discourse by opting to take charge of their own recovery (Russell & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2015; Hockey, 2005), or to question medical advice and turn to their running colleagues for support (Philippe et al, 2016). According to Lev (2019), how distance runners respond to bodily pain and distress is grounded and negotiated in shared interactional practices as part of the running social world. This suggests that the power of specific ultra-running discourses may be difficult to resist, especially during times of perceived vulnerability and liminality such as injury.

Docility is a complex phenomenon in the world of sport. The overly compliant docile ‘running’ body conforms to the discourses and expectations of their lived space. This strengthens bonds between endurance runners contributing to a sense of belonging and camaraderie (Bale, 2006). This socially constructed running identity risks being challenged when the runner experiences an injury (Hockey, 2005). As such, ultra-runners may lean into established and familiar discourses in an attempt to manage the discomfort of uncertainty and liminality. Through injury, the body is experienced as unfamiliar, alien and unhomelike (Svenaeus, 2015). In his study with injured runners, Lev discovered that experiences of first person alienation cause them to automatically resist the injured body part causing pain describing themselves as subjects experiencing pain and their pain as an object (Lev, 2020). Externalising parts of the body in this way further reinforces mind body dualisms and ‘the body as a machine’ metaphor (Black, 2014). This is a useful metaphor for injured ultra-runners as machines don’t feel pain (Bale, 2006).

With regard to ultra-runners specifically, whether injury provides opportunities to resist dominant discourses is largely unknown. What we do know, is that athletes are always interacting with and shaping their running space in nuanced ways (Jones et al, 2022). While research about the experiences of injured ultra-runners is still in its infancy (Hall & Rhodes, 2022), even less is known about the corporeal experiences of these athletes, and the extent to which injury shifts or alters their experience of their body. In order to understand this, research needs to acknowledge the socio-cultural frame of their experiences while also adopting research methods that can enable an exploration of the multiple layers of meaning and affective embodied experience.

The Body in Pain

The social environment has a powerful impact on the body in pain (Lev, 2020). Research suggests that pain in a sporting context is different to pain encountered in everyday life and has a different ontology (Lurie in Loland et al, (Eds), 2006).

This suggests that ultra-runner's experiences of pain cannot be understood within normative non-running cultural paradigms, dominated by bio-medical conceptualisations of pain and suffering. Instead, their subjective experience of felt pain is filtered through dominant discourses of endurance, normalisation of pain, and an internalised medical discourse based on personal experience (Hall & Rhodes, 2022). Pain has an immediacy that pushes inwards, directing attention to the body part in pain, entailing a retreat of the runner into their body (Green, 2011). As in the case of injury, research suggests that embodied awareness becomes split into a familiar mind-body dualism in an attempt to regain a sense of agency and control over the failing body. What ensues is an iterative process which results in physical adaptations until meaning can be put to the pain experience (Philippe et al, 2016). Meaning however is influenced by culture and discourse. While the idea of culture shapes the meaning that is attributed to pain, it also impacts the way an athlete responds (Bendelow & Williams, 1995), meaning that cultural norms and expectations are often adhered to in order to reinforce the athletes membership to the running community.

The body-in-pain experience is also dominated by another dualism; injury related pain versus non-injury related pain (Bale in Loland et al (Eds), 2006). Research suggests that for ultra-runners experiencing pain, this thought process tends to dominate the iterative search for meaning (Hall & Rhodes, 2022), as ultra-runners state that they will only stop running if they think (through cognitive appraisal) that they are injured and risk further injury if they continue running (Philippe et al, 2016; Heil, 2012). This is consistent with Kotarba's (1983) research on chronic pain demonstrating that pain is calculated as a matter of profit and loss. This preoccupation with making sense of pain through an iterative cognitive appraisal process means that experienced athletes develop a nuanced knowledge of pain and a heightened sensitivity and awareness to uncomfortable and painful bodily experiences (Lev, 2019; McNarry et al, 2020). However it also suggests that these athletes revert to a dualistic disembodiment of mind-over-matter in an attempt to overcome and manage the uncomfortable experience. Similarly, in their work with professional dancers, Ravn (2017) suggests that for these athletes their body is always the subject of experience, even in the absence of pain, as they assess what 'feels right' in order to perform their dance. As such, it has been suggested that rather than thinking of the body as absent, the body should be thought of as transparent to experience for expert movers (Legrand, 2007). Consistent with these findings and as Leder (1990) would suggest, in the sporting world of expert movers body disappearance is not a silent one (Ravn, 2017). Similarly, in her research with joggers, Zeiler (2010) refers to a pre-reflective bodily awareness that means the body is always the thematic object of experience. When injured, the hurt body part disrupts intentionality and the joggers 'mind-body-world relation' (Zeiler, 2010 p. 336).

The other aspect of pain in this context is the public dimension (Scott, Cova & Cayla, 2017), which serves to enhance a sense of belonging to the running community through obtaining social recognition (Atkinson, 2008). Part of this performative element of the pain experience results in significant

resources being directed towards narrating the experience (Scott et al, 2017), creating and (re)telling stories of strength and suffering. Research suggests that injured endurance runners will often instrumentalize their pain to gain social recognition and to reaffirm their running identity (Lev, 2020; Hockey, 2005).

While these performative stories of injury and pain provide some reassurance to the athlete and their membership to the ultra-running community, they are filtered through a discourse of heroism and toughness (Jaeschke et al, 2016; Finn, 2019). The notion of positive pain (Howe, 2004) and good pain (Hanold, 2010) has also been described among endurance athletes. In their research with competitive swimmers, McNarry et al (2020) suggest that these positive experiences of pain are related to the experiential knowledge that the athlete develops over time about their body, to formulate an understanding of what good pain is. They state that good pain and discomfort are perceived as by-products of training and performance (McNarry et al, 2020), reinforcing relevant cultural discourses relating to sport and performance. Given the cultural differences that are likely to exist between performance swimmers and ultra-runners, it is not known whether these athletes share a similar experience of good or positive pain.

While research provides some insight into aspects of the endurance runners experiences of pain and injury, research that seeks to understand the affective and embodied experiences of pain is needed, especially for ultra-runners. The question also remains as to whether the experiences of endurance runners are different to ultra-runners, or whether the experiences of these athletes are somewhat unique.

This study seeks to address gaps in the literature by asking injured ultra-runner's to represent their embodied experiences of injury through body mapping. In doing so, we adopted a cultural phenomenological approach (Csordas, 2002), taking into account the embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners and the ways in which these experiences are culturally shaped and mediated through various discourses.

The specific aims of the study were to understand what socio-cultural discourses are resisted and reinforced through ultra-runner's experiences of pain and injury, to identify difficult and/or hidden experiences that are revealed by pain and injury, and to understand how injury contributes to new ways of being for the ultra-runner.

4.4 Methods

Participants

We used purposive sampling techniques to recruit eight runners through social media running groups, and through posts on the pages of online community running groups explaining the purpose and procedures of the study. We recruited five women and three men, with an age range of 37 – 57 years. All currently reside in Sydney, ranging from the Blue Mountains to the Northern Beaches, with five runners stating that they moved to Australia from their native country of England several years ago.

All of the runners had competed in several ultra-marathons, from 50km to 240km. See Table 4.1 for a detailed description.

Table 4.1. Ultra-Runners Characteristics

Name	Age	Location	Number of Ultra Running Events	Longest event	Recent Injury Type	Current Running Status
Naomi	42	Western Sydney	3	50km (Ultra Trail Australia)	Fibroid on uterus	None
Lauren	37	Sydney Northern Beaches	4	223km (Larapinta Trail)	Hip stress fracture	Slowly returning
Craig	55	North West Sydney	5	100km (Ultra Trail Australia)	Hamstring tendinopathy	Slowly returning
Lisa	42	Blue Mountains	3	100km (Ultra Train Australia)	Iliotibial band syndrome (ITB)	Slowly returning
Rick	57	North West Sydney	76	240km (Coast to Kosci)	Snapped rotator cuff and herniated bicep	None
James	50	Blue Mountains	4	100km (Ultra Trail Australia)	Torn meniscus, knee	Slowly returning
Chantelle	50	South West Sydney	1	50km (Stromlo Canberra)	Patellar Tendinopathy	Walking only
Kelly	46	North West Sydney	2	50km (Ultra Trail Australia)	Fractured sacrum	Slowly returning

**Names have been changed to protect confidentiality*

At the time of the interviews, all of the runners had sustained a recent injury, with two runners unable to run at all, five slowly returning post-injury and one only able to walk and hike. While six of the runners had sustained their injury while running, one runner became injured through a fall while skiing (Kelly) and the other unable to run due to a fibroid requiring surgery (Naomi). Both participants describe experiences of pain, and both were unable to run for a period of time. They were included in the study given the research aims around understand embodied experience of pain and injury.

Ultra-running was defined as having competed in at least one 50km + event. All of the runners had competed in several marathons (42.2km) as well as other long to medium distant runs. Injuries ranged from direct running related injuries such as iliotibial band syndrome and meniscus tears, to non-running related injuries such as fibroids and shoulder injuries. All of the runners had experienced a recent interruption to their running.

Procedures

The study was approved by the University of Sydney Research Ethics Committee. Participants were initially contacted via telephone after they responded to the social media post. The aims and requirements of the study were then explained. Participant information sheets were then sent via email and meetings were then arranged via email and text message.

Participants were interviewed at Sydney University. They were given a full explanation about the research process including the use of audio recordings and transcriptions, how confidentiality will be managed, the risks and benefits of participating, and the right to withdraw consent or participation at any time. Following this discussion, informed written consent was obtained.

The interview process began with providing a more detailed discussion of the aims and purpose of the study. All of the runners enquired about the running experience of the first author. A brief exchange occurred where the first author explained her own running and ultra-running background. By the first author purposefully sharing her own vulnerability, a non-judgemental and safe space was created opening up meaningful and 'power leveling' interactions (Packard, 2008). After this exchange, it was noticed that all of the participants appeared to relax into their own storytelling.

The goal of the first author during the interview process was to engage in a conversational process, creating a dialogic intersection and interaction between two worlds (Gadamer, 1975). This give and take process required openness and flexibility (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011).

As such the interview was a co-creation of meaning in that ‘meaning’ was created through an iterative process during the storytelling between the researcher and participant. The interviews loosely followed several prompting questions;

- Tell me about your running history?
- When and why did you start running?
- What do you enjoy about running?
- What does running mean to you?
- Tell me about your injury?
- How has your injury impacted you?
- Has it impacted how you feel about your body? What have you noticed about your body since being injured?
- What is your experience of pain? (injury and non-injury related)
- What is it like to be unable to run?

The interviews were intentionally conducted immediately before the body mapping process, to position the participant within their injury story. Positioning the narrative first, enabled the story to elicit the artwork representing a shift from more traditional arts based research where the artworks are used to elicit the narrative. The latter, privileging the verbal narrative material.

Body Mapping Methods

Traditional qualitative research methods rely on surveys or interviews, operating under the assumption that lived experience can be adequately represented through language and narrative. However, these methods are unable to capture lived experiences that either sit outside or are unable to be accessed through these more traditional means.

Arts based research methods provide unique opportunities for power relations enacted through discursive practices to be explored and potentially resisted (Boydell, 2021). In addition to discursive practices, experiences of injury and pain often cannot be expressed in words. Hence, in some cases these experiences can affect the ability to communicate (Zeiler, 2010). Physical pain does not simply resist language, it destroys it (Scarry, 1985). As such, body mapping is a useful tool to understand the impact of pain and injury on ultra-runners’ embodiment.

The body mapping interviews were conducted by the first author and guided by the protocol adapted from Gastaldo et al, (2012) and Boydell (2021). The process began with a discussion around the meaning of embodiment and the process of body mapping. Participants were encouraged to visualise

their injury experience and consider how they might represent this on their body map. The entire interview and mapping process lasted from two to three hours.

Body Mapping Processes

Body mapping involves a participant tracing a life-sized outline of their body before populating the space with visual representations, symbols and words related to the experience under investigation (Gastaldo et al, 2012; De Jager et al, 2016). Participants were asked to lie on a large sheet of paper, in a position they feel comfortable. The first author then traced around their body.

Six of the participants expressed surprise at ‘seeing’ the outline of their body. They were then provided with an assortment of coloured pens, crayons, pencils, paints and paint brushes, magazines, scissors and glue.

Many layered their artworks, by drawing and painting over the top of images. This provided the participants with a unique level of reflexivity and multiple layers of storytelling (Boydell, 2021).

Many of the participants required further explanation, with all of them seeking to understand the parameters and ‘rules’ of the exercise. While the first author resisted in providing rigid parameters, gentle guidance was provided by naming an experience the participant referred to in their interview and encouraging them to represent this on their body.

All but one participant then managed to continue working on their map, while engaging in casual discussion with the first author. During these discussions, field notes were taken and then used to develop a key for each body map (Boydell, 2021). The field notes were also used to help the authors situate the participants stories in the present moment and context.

Participants returned their artworks several days later. This provided an opportunity for the first author to answer any final questions.

The interviews were then transcribed, compiled into a narrative summary and sent to the participants for member checking with the option to adjust stories that did not align with their lived experience.

4.5 Analysis

Visual Analysis

Riessman’s (2008) approach formed the framework of the analysis of the body maps with Rose’s (2016) sites of visual analysis providing a guide for the process of analysis. Specifically, the focus of analysis was from three sites. The first looking at how the participants’ social circumstances brought

about the production of the image, and the use of colour and positioning. The second being how the image represents different affective responses designed to persuade the audience, and the third being the subjective processes that govern how the participant and author/researcher responds to the body map (Rose, 2016).

Analysis of the maps began with a modified version of visual content analysis (Rose, 2016). This involved the development of a key for each body map, utilizing the field notes captured during the mapping process. This key was transcribed into a table for each body map, describing each symbol and colour, the location on the body map and what each symbol represents from the participants' own words. For each body map, we tracked between the visual key and narrative summaries, looking for embodied narrative themes using several prompts;

- Who are the embodied selves that the artist is representing?
- How do these selves relate to their injury stories?
- How do the images on the map give form to the artists injury and pain experience?
- What are the points of divergence and intersection between the body map and narrative?
- What do the images reveal about embodied experiences that may be hidden or difficult to access?

Narrative Analysis

The analysis of the narrative interview followed several stages beginning with the construction of first person narratives.

After these were member checked, the analysis involved a process of meaning condensation (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). While coding breaks down a text into smaller units, meaning interpretation may extend the original text by adding hermeneutic layers that enable the researcher to understand meaning (p. 231).

The narratives were read through several times by both authors. The first author then generated natural meaning units within the text as expressed by the participants. Next, the theme that dominated a natural meaning unit was restated by the first author. These themes were then cross checked by the second author. The first author then re-read each narrative, engaging in an iterative process of meaning condensation grounded in the philosophical hermeneutic tradition (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2006). The goal of this process was to understand meaning and to make sense of experience, uncovering what it means *to be* as it shows up or reveals itself through the story (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011).

Representations of Pain & Injury

The participant's told stories were positioned within an embodied framework, bringing their corporeal subjectivities to the foreground through their stories and artwork.

All of the interviews followed a temporal sequence until the injury story. Once participants were asked about their injury, temporality ceased as the narrative became centred around corporeal moments of being, characterised by pain and suffering. For nearly all participants, this point of interruption was represented by points of divergence and multiple layers of meaning across narrative and visual material. We focussed on notable representations of liminality, as well as unspoken emotional processes and historical traumas revealed through the pain of injury. We were also interested in how the participants embodied subjectivities that seemed to shift in response to injury and contributed to new ways of being in their social worlds. Stories of recovery and healing were also identified, alongside representations of fear and hope.

The artworks and verbal narratives for each participant were merged into a vivid and revealing story, with notable points of intersection and divergence. Together, the artworks and verbal stories gave 'voice' to each other culminating in vulnerable and compelling stories of liminality, duality and existential struggle.

The eight merged stories were then compared, with common images and themes identified. By combining these rich somatic stories of injury and pain, plot lines were delicately woven throughout preserving the lived experience of each artist. This meant that each story could be represented within and between these plots as an embodied whole, as opposed to pulling apart narratives and identifying themes to create a disembodied interpretation.

Pseudonyms were used throughout to maintain confidentiality, and a selection of images are presented to enhance the readers engagement with the ultra-runners lived experiences of injury. The results are presented as plot lines and narrative tropes to demonstrate the fluidity of shifting subjectivities and polyphony.

The master and sub-plot lines we identified are;

- Body-self transformation
 - a. The disciplined and lean body
 - b. Running away from former ways of being
 - c. Seeking to be seen and whole
- Machina Carnis
 - d. Corporeal betrayal
 - e. Modern Automata makers
 - f. Fortis Corporis

- Senescence
 - g. Running out of time
 - h. Playing with death

4.6 Results

Six of the eight participants referred to the interview and body mapping process as therapeutic. When asked further, they all explained that they had never before had the opportunity to ‘think’ about their body in this way. These comments provided early insight into how participants made sense of the research process, and that they were able to embrace what was being asked of them.

Our analysis of the artworks and narratives revealed three main narrative plots, each with a number of sub-plots. We followed these plot lines through each of the merged narratives. The result was a layered analysis and rich polyphony drawing on themes representing the embodied experiences of these injured athletes.

Impact of COVID-19

The interviews were conducted in 2020 and 2021. During this time, the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in several ‘lockdowns’ with people being encouraged to stay at home.

All runners indicated that their running had been impacted by COVID-19 at the time of the study with five runners having had events cancelled during the past 12 months. One runner was also recovering from COVID-19 at the time of the interview.

Three runners described their current injury in the context of over training due to postponed and cancelled events resulting from lockdowns. They explained that when an event was postponed they would continue training, often rolling into the next event. This meant they did not rest and recover. They explained that this overtraining was a contributing factor to their injury.

Two runners explained that running during lockdowns was the way they managed experiences of feeling trapped and imprisoned, and the daily stress of managing home schooling and family dynamics. One runner explained that this led to over training on hard surfaces as she was not able to access her usual trails.

Body-self Transformation

Several participants spoke about running as a vehicle for self-transformation and a way of seeking different ways of being. For some this appears to be driven by a desire to run away from an unhappy life, while for others it’s about searching for something more. To be seen and to experience a different way of being after disappearing into child rearing and family sacrifice.

For some participants, running is a way of achieving a fit and lean body. By objectifying their body

and submitting to the disciplinary effects of running, these participants can be witnessed and endorsed by others as belonging to a subculture shaped by discourses of endurance and strength. A corporeal awakening after a period of bodily disappearance.

Injury confronts this process in various ways and brings up unwanted reflections of former selves along with fears about the future, regret at what could have been and grief about what has been lost. What results is a questioning about present selves, and a reluctance to move towards a future which feels uncertain.

Through persistent chronic pain and multiple injuries, Chantel's body map illustrates a determination and desire to be seen as strong. However, her embodied experience continues to challenge this transformation (Figure 4.1)

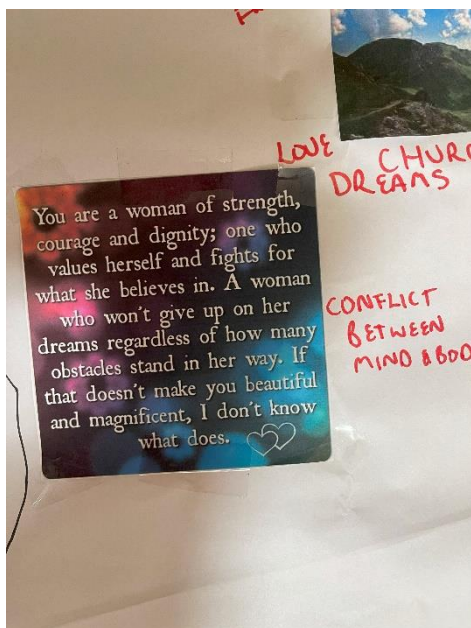


Figure 4.1

Within the Transformation plot, we identified three sub-plots;

1. The disciplined and lean body
2. Running away from former ways of being
3. Seeking to be seen and to be whole

The disciplined and lean body

Participants spoke about why they started running. For several, the lure of a fit and lean body pulls them into submitting to empowering ultra-running discourses (Hanold, 2010). Broadly speaking the disciplining effects of running go unquestioned because they are produced through desire (Hanold, 2010; Foucault, 1994). However, for several of the participants in this study, this is amplified by an additional desire to move away from an unfamiliar body-self that has experienced significant change and growth through weight gain and pregnancy. A vessel which has produced and reared offspring, that is now left empty and unfamiliar. According to Kelly, she started running;

"...to get rid of the last few kilos of baby weight..."

Kelly refers here to her determination to 'rid' herself from the burden of her former way of being. A suggestion of the transformation she is about to begin.

The dissonance of becoming physically smaller to be seen and accepted appears to be born out of an awareness that the body-self is now empty and unfamiliar. The desire to be lean and fit, which is achieved through ultra-running for these participants seems to provide a transformation towards greater fulfillment and success. Creating new subjectivities and different ways of being.

Lisa started running after having her children because she was “*interested in getting fit*”. Running transformed Lisa’s body-self from a self-proclaimed “*unfit*” wife and mum to a strong and fit ultra-runner who has successfully completed several ultra-marathons and at the time of injury, had been training for a 260km event.

Craig’s physical transformation took several years and began after a period of weight gain while raising his children. After gaining a significant amount of weight, his weight loss journey was triggered by a photo he saw where “*I didn’t recognise myself*”. This jarring experience of unfamiliarity seemed to shift Craig’s awareness producing a corporeal awakening and a desire to transform his body-self.

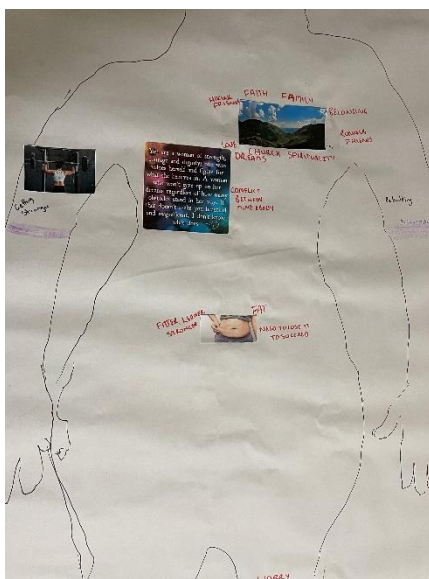


Figure 4.2

Chantel talks about her weight gain as being “*pretty challenging*”. She refers to a 10kg weight gain since injury and the difficulty she is experiencing in losing weight. Chantel smiled as she explained ;

“I’ve lost 5 kilos in the past couple of weeks, so I can see I’m getting back into the swing of things”.

Gaining weight for Chantel represented a shift back to a former self. The relief she experienced in losing weight was visible in her body language. Her smile, relaxed shoulders and playful tone of voice. The relief of swinging back towards a strong and lean body-self. (Figure 4.2)

For one participant, the desire to transform her body-self through running returns her to past experiences of emotional pain, restriction and self-loathing;

“I can look in the mirror and think I’m totally overweight after not running for one day. I know this is ridiculous but that’s where my mind is sometimes”.

Any pause in Kelly’s running journey confronts her with her suffering former self, manifested through body dissatisfaction and self-loathing. This experience produces her desire to keep moving away from this past pain. A fit and lean body represents Kelly’s ongoing resistance to past trauma and suffering and her transformation into a strong and resilient body-self.

Running away from former ways of being

Some participants described running as a way of achieving more fulfilling subjectivities. This appears to be driven by unhappiness and a desire for something more and different. Possibly the most extreme example of this is Craig. After a marriage breakdown, many years as a business owner and retired elite footballer, Craig began running and completely changed his life;

“I just did the whole kahuna life change. But it wasn’t just about the running, I think it was more about...I didn’t like life, being what I was”.

Ultra-running provided Craig with a purpose and a direction. It allowed him to experience an alternative way of being from *“drinking beer, having too many BBQ’s and not being active enough”* to someone who travels the world competing in ultra-marathons, and is a sought after running coach.

“I changed my whole life. Gave up work. Had a business for 27 years. That was 4 years ago”.

The liminality caused by injury has hijacked Craig’s newly founded indelible subjectivity. His lengthy battle with multiple injuries has forced Craig to confront what he gave up, resulting in fluctuating and alternating experiences of denial, persistence and regret;

“ To be honest, I probably gave up the business two to three years too early”

“I think with ultra-running you’re always injured. It’s just a case of how injured are you?”

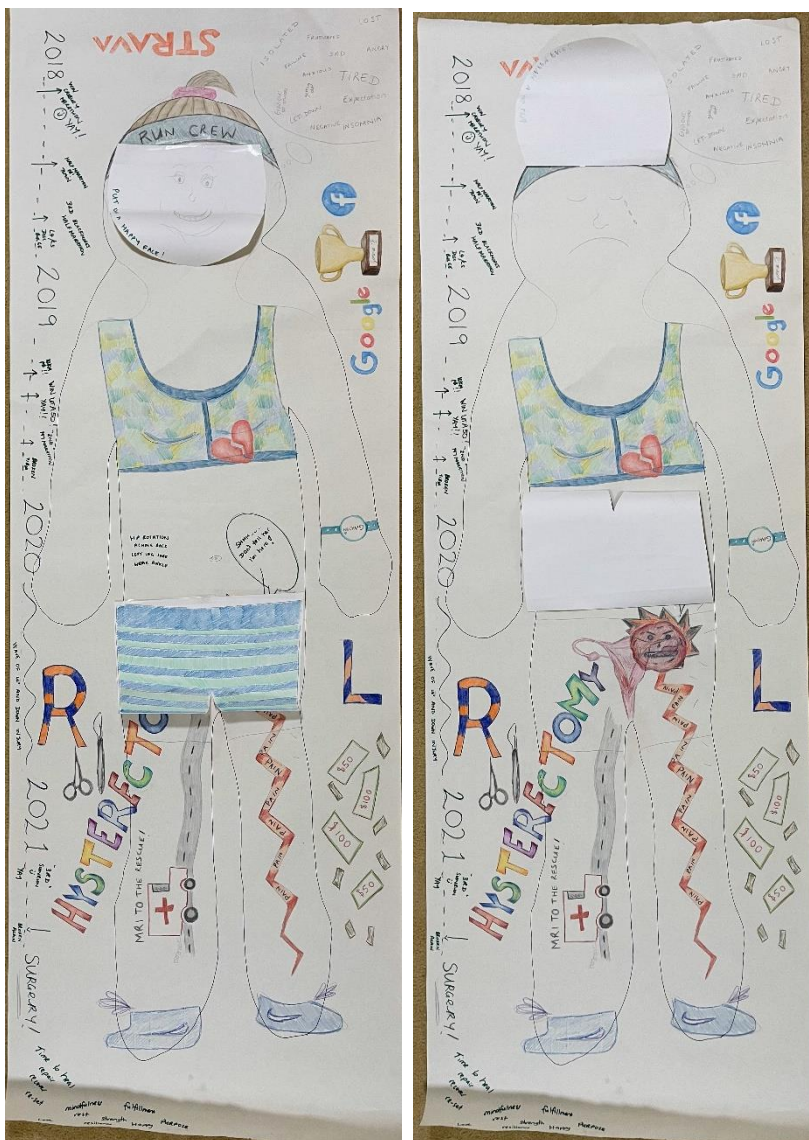


Figure 4.3

Naomi describes running as a way to “better myself”. Her experience of being “pretty good at this” and of being seen by other’s in the running community as a competent runner has offered Naomi an alternative way of being, an internalised experience of being successful and accomplished.

Naomi’s body map represents current and former ways of being. Both existing in the one body, with Naomi’s current suffering hidden underneath her performative running self (Figure 4.3).

The confronting experience of injury, and an uncertain running future has since shifted Naomi’s subjectivity.

She describes chronic anxiety, insomnia and a temporary marriage separation at a time when she felt unable to put meaning to her physical pain. Injury has injected fear and doubt into Naomi’s transformation.

For one participant, his desire for transformation has its genesis in an idealised representation of a former body-self. According to James;

“I’ve always been a runner, but I struggled with the discipline when I was young”. After having a family and spending years building on running longer distances, James is determined to transform into a version of his former self. “This time, I went into it [100km training] incredibly disciplined”.

For James, discipline is the ingredient that he believes will transform him into a successful ultra-runner. However recurring knee injuries where “*my knee just collapses under me*” has threatened to collapse his hopes for an ultra-running future (Figure 4.4). Despite this, he remains determined to progress towards his transformation;

“I still want to believe. I’ve convinced myself to maintain the belief that I can do it [100km event]”

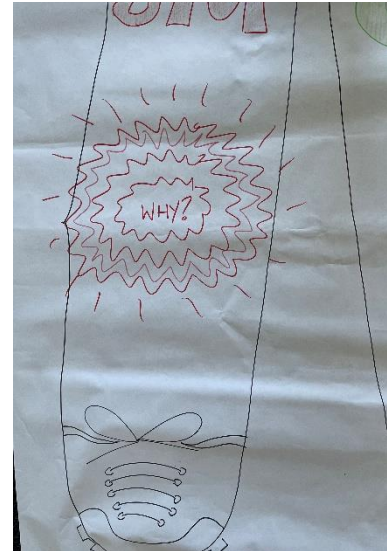


Figure 4.4

Seeking to be seen and to be whole

Several participants describe the sacrifices and self-lessness of raising children and managing the demands of a family. Craig refers to this as a time when;

“...you can forget about your life, or your life takes a back seat. Your life goes missing for a while”.

James refers to his love of the outdoors, and of multi-day treks which led him into trail running. However he states that;

“I ended up moving away from that because of the family life”.

Kelly spoke about moving to Australia from England 22 years ago. Being away from her family and friends, Kelly started a family and immersed herself into motherhood. Her running journey initially began as a way of developing social connections after a period of disappearing into her family. Initially describing running as something which “*really really hurt*”, Kelly found that;

“when I started running with people who actually just wanted to run and talk was when I really started to enjoy it”.

Running offered Kelly a way of being seen and a (re)introduction to the social world post motherhood. This enabled her to transcend existing subjectivities. Transformation towards a socially connected self.

After having her third baby, a personal trainer encouraged Lisa to begin her running journey. After running several ultra-marathons she describes;

“I love feeling physically strong. I love the confidence that comes with training and seeing yourself progress”.



Figure 4.5

Lisa's transformation towards strength and confidence also evolved after a period of motherhood and bodily disappearance. For Lisa, progress is suggestive of a journey, a changing body resulting in shifting subjectivities from invisibility to embodied strength.

Lisa's body map illustrates her desire to be seen, with friends and family all watching and supporting at her shoulders (Figure 4.5).

Lauren explains how she started "*the serious running*" after having her second child.

"I ran my first marathon when he was just six months old".

What followed for Lauren was an embodied transformation interrupted by injury. Through the mirror of injury Lauren has been confronted with past traumas which threaten to unravel her body-self transformation (Figure 4.6). Recently, her steadfast determination has begun to buckle under the weight of her past emotional pain resulting in her seeking the support of a Psychologist.

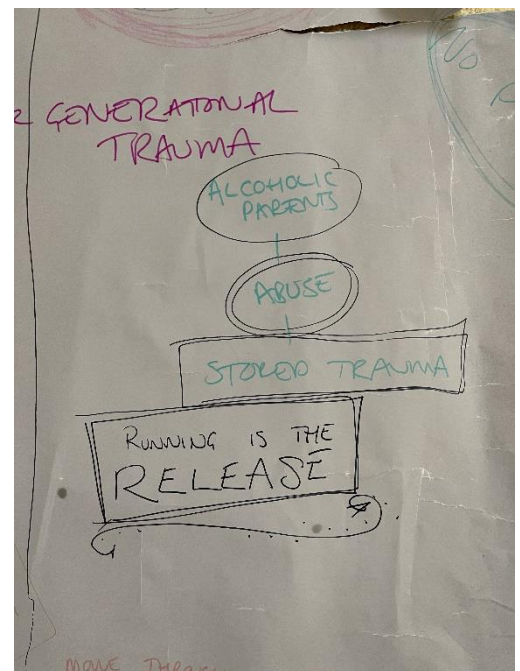


Figure 4.6

***Machina Carnis* (Black, 2014).**

The mechanistic view of the body brought about by anatomy, requires that the body be understood as a closed system that can be explained according to discrete internal subsystems. However, the body as it appears to embody human perception is a single entity that functions as an interface with its environment and other bodies. A site of exchange and interaction (Black, 2014)

In activities founded upon searching and surpassing one's limits, the body becomes an alter ego. An adversary forced into submission so as to obtain a performance from it (Le Breton, 2000). For the

ultra-running body, this takes the form of an athletic machine, a body project built to endure and surpass human-like qualities like fatigue and exhaustion.

When injured, the body emerges as an alien presence, causing participants to engage in first person body alienation resisting parts of the body that are causing pain (Lev, 2020). In this context, the body-machine becomes a useful meaning making metaphor. This protects discursive constructions of the ultra-running self by resisting threats of vulnerability. What ensues is a project involving the gathering and selective internalisation of expert (medical) information, with the aim of rebuilding the machine.

Within the Machina Carnis plot, we identified three subplots;

1. Corporeal betrayal
2. Modern Automata Makers
3. Fortis Corporis

Corporeal betrayal

James refers to a time pre-injury when he would submit to his body's intentions;

"When you go running, you just let your body tell you what you should be doing today". The machine is in charge, and the mind submits to its will. However this relationship is significantly fractured when the machine fails or breaks.

For Craig, first person body alienation is demonstrated by his body-machine 'speaking' to him when it breaks;

"the body just said nope, I'm not happy with you anymore and you have to pay the price" The price being to stop running.

The machina carnis (Black, 2014) stops working. While Craig demonstrates the consequences of pushing the body-machine beyond what it can do, limitations can be confronting as the hope for many participants is to push beyond them and keep going. Craig's body map shows a clear separation between his mind and body, both represented in contrasting colours of yellow and green (Figure 4.7).

Kelly talks about what she believes is required to compete in ultra-marathons;



Figure 4.7

“you need to just push beyond what you know you’re capable of and have faith in your mind and body”.

When the body-machine breaks however, all faith is lost. The machine can no longer be trusted as it has made known its limitations.

For some participants, pain signals potential limitations of the body-machine. This brings up fear and denial;

“I felt absolute pain and then I was like, it’s not there. And then it just disappeared. So I kept running”.

Kelly spoke about her ability to “block it [pain] out” Denying the faltering machine, and flipping the dynamic by empowering the mind to take back control of the machine.

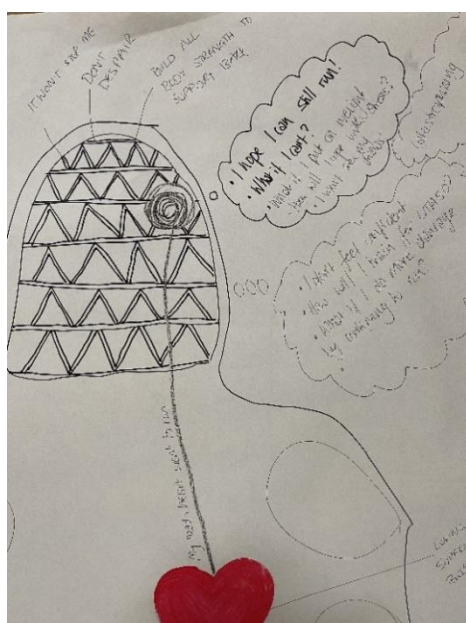


Figure 4.8

Kelly's body map illustrates a strong mind, built over time, allowing her to dissociate from pain altogether (Figure 4.8).

Rick's powerful portrayal of resistance can be seen in his body map, with words and phrases all sitting outside his body. Rick experienced significant difficulty emplacing his experiences onto his body map. Stating *'I just don't know where to start'*. He then proceeded to release his pet bird from its cage explaining that *'he can't fly because his wing has been clipped'*. Rick then painted amber coloured circles within his body representing his worry and anxiety (Figure 4.9).

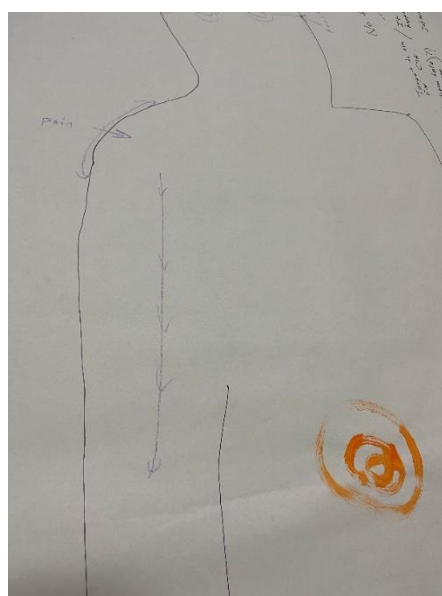


Figure 4.9

Rick speaks about “*being used to pain*”, and of “*pain being my guide*”. His relationship with pain built over many years of ultra-running. For Rick, the machine **must** be indelible, because as he states; “*not running does my head in*”. The confronting reality of a faulty machine-body is too much to bear, and so Rick’s resistance enables him to continue running. Experiencing pain as being outside of his body allows Rick to make decisions, remaining in control.

Naomi’s metaphor of a mannequin visually illustrates her helplessness at the moment of injury;

“In that moment I just feel helpless. Like if you were to pull a mannequin out of the clothing and the clothing just falls to the floor. I feel like that’s it. The bone structure’s gone and I just feel deflated”.

Naomi refers to a sudden and dramatic shift in corporeal subjectivity, of lacking structure and of crumbling and vanishing. A stark contrast to her former way of being. What remains are the symbols of what once was, running symbols that represent Naomi’s running-self. (as seen in Figure 3).

James spoke about experiencing problems ‘trusting’ his body since injury;

“I’m really struggling with that trust element, and then I’ve got these two friends who are physio’s telling me to just stop running”

James refers to the liminality of being injured and the uncertainty of his running future. His distrust in his body has allowed for the opinions of other’s to seep into his subjective experience.

Chantel chooses to surrender her body to the opinions of health professionals;

“I’ve pulled out of UTA before and sold my ticket because my physio said don’t do it. And I’ve spent money to see him, it’s a trust thing”.

Lisa believes that she doesn’t need to trust her body;

“I don’t think I trust my body, but I don’t feel like I need to”.

Lisa also states that she has a physiotherapist who “*I trust and think is pretty good*”. Lisa also makes frequent references to a number of personal trainers and experts who she believes have helped her rebuild her body-self post-mothering. Corporeal surrendering, and submitting to medical discourse.

After many months of intermittent knee swelling and pain, James spoke about losing trust in his body and in his ability to manage his injuries.

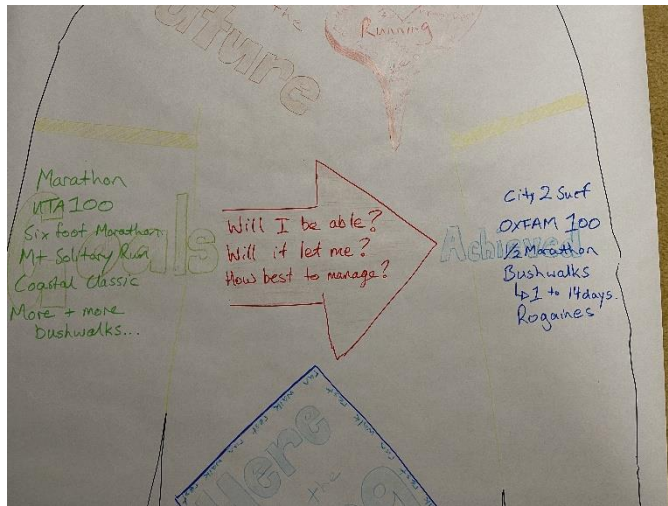


Figure 4.10

"I need to trust that that niggles that I'm feeling can be managed....but I'm really struggling with that trust element. Am I able to make this work?"

James is plagued by questions and uncertainty, fluctuating between his former running self and an uncertain running future (Figure 4.10).

Modern Automata Makers (Black, 2014)

While originally designed to reproduce the *appearance* of living things since classical Greek times, in the eighteenth century automata evolved into actual simulations created to reproduce physiology (Black, 2014).

Automata makers found ways to replicate aspects of living creatures, generating insight into the inner workings of the human body (Black, 2014). Their over simplified demonstrations rested on the perception that all human functions could be mechanically represented. The implication being, that if it is a function can be replicated it can be fixed when broken.

Many participants in this study identify a struggle in finding the 'right' professional to fix or repair their machine-body, frustrated with the limited knowledge of medical specialists. What they seek, is a modern automata maker who demonstrates an understanding of the function of the body and importantly, knows exactly how to fix it.

Lisa spoke about her encounters with medical professionals;

"I've been to a range of different physio's over the years, but I've got one now that I sort of trust and think is pretty good"

Naomi spoke about several different diagnosis given by different specialists, until she found one who promised her relief after only one week off running.

"What I love about this Dr is that she's all for the cosmetic side just as much as the surgery side. It's keyhole surgery and the incisions are tiny".

What this means for Naomi, is a quick return to running.

Craig spoke about seeing two different specialists after a suspected tear in his meniscus;

“I went to two specialists. One said there’s a tear in there, and the other said what tear? You have some wear and tear in there but I’ll see you in four years.”

Credibility is frequently questioned when the advice does not align with the participants desire to continue running;

“This guy was most likely twice the weight he should be, and he told me at my age I shouldn’t be running. And I’m looking at him going man you should lose 60kg at least”.

Rick was quick to find a reason not to adhere to the advice of one GP who instructed him to stop running.

When Kelly was confronted by a GP who told her she should decrease her running after fracturing her sacrum in two places, she stated;

“no disrespect to her but she didn’t look like she did fitness and didn’t look like she was sporty. I think she was teaching herself about it as we were going through the process.”

Instead, Kelly chose a health professional recommended by a friend who also runs. Despite admitting the person she was seeing was *“not a qualified doctor”*., she stated that *“they have a lot more awareness of the physical body and how it works with running”*. This particular specialist supported Kelly’s decision to continue running with her lower back pain.

Some participants feel validated when the medical advice is ‘proven’ to be wrong. Rick competed in a 260km ultra-marathon just six months after reconstructive knee surgery. His surgeon told him would be *“lucky to be able to run 5km”*. However as Rick explained;

“I proved him wrong”

Other participants rely on internalised medical discourse to directly question medical advice.

After visiting a doctor following her constant pain in her lower back, Naomi was not convinced that the diagnosis was correct;

“I don’t think that was the cause of my problem.”

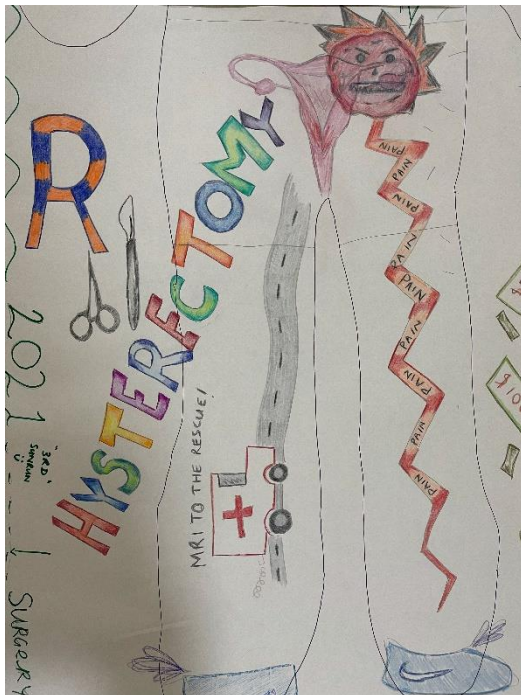


Figure 4.11

Instead, Naomi continued running until the pain became unbearable. Then she went to see a different specialist and received another diagnosis. According to the MRI scan she had an L5 disk tear in her back. After looking at her own MRI scans, and taking note of a small fibroid on her uterus, Naomi was still distrustful. After seeing two different gynaecologists, she was finally happy with the diagnosis and solution.

"I decided to go down the route of a hysterectomy. I feel like this is the answer to my problems".

Naomi's Body Map illustrates her frustration and anger, embodied in her injury experience and existing alongside her [final] relief at obtaining what she feels is the correct diagnosis (Figure 4.11)

James spoke about two of his friends who are physiotherapists. Both have told him he shouldn't be running due to his meniscus tears in both knees.

"But this physio I'm with knows there's no point in saying that. He says I'm just going to give you the best guidance I can to allow you to give this the best shot"

" So I do really enjoy going to this particular physio "

Fortis Corporis (Muller, 2017)

Many participants responded to the challenge of injury by (re)building stronger bodies than before. For some, this involved a resistance to the body-machine metaphor, or *machina carnis* and a fleshy corporeal experience of building strength. *Fortis Corporis* (Muller, 2017).

Before beginning her body map Lisa referred to her body as Kintsugi, the traditional Japanese art of repairing broken cracked pottery using lacquer and gold.

"I feel like through injury, my body is stronger than before. Like the stretch marks I have from having my kids. They have made me stronger and my body more beautiful".

The symmetry between Lisa's physical scars from having children and her running injury 'scars' reflect different subjectivities, both contributing to an embodied strength and beauty. On her body map hidden beneath a black opaque façade are golden stars representing the sites of pain and injury (Figure 4.12).

Several participants refer to a process of rebuilding post-injury, with an embodied strength intended to transcend the limits of the body-machine.

Rick, when referring to his recovery post knee reconstruction; *"I built it up slowly"* Through this build Rick described an iterative process of attuning and responding to pain, like the early stages of a new relationship.

When talking about her looming hysterectomy to remove a large fibroid pressing on her sacrum, Naomi relies on her running coach to help (re)build her running body-self;

"Terry will build me properly"

Chantel, diagnosed with fibromyalgia refers to a consistent journey of building strength to avoid *"being in a wheelchair by the time I'm 60"*.

Each building block feels unstable as the threat of sickness is an ever present cloud threatening to rain down on her progress. Chantel is very aware of the limitations of her body-machine and so her focus is on maintenance as opposed to (re)building.

Kelly refers to the importance of strength training to protect her body-machine;

"I always have pain when I run, but I know when I'm going to the gym regularly the pain is less, and I just feel stronger and faster".

Although Kelly states *"my mind has always been strong"*. She refers to her pained body as a project that is out of alignment with her mind.

Something she repeatedly tries to *"block out"*.

The fragility and vulnerability Kelly experiences in her body is a confronting reflection of her mother's fragility when she was younger, as she explains her mother's battle with suicide and mental health.

Kelly's resistance is to build her body-machine to align with her



Figure 4.12

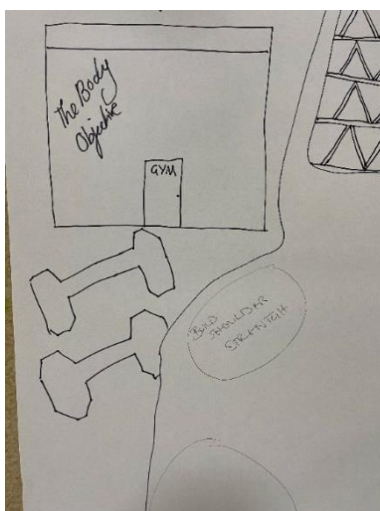


Figure 4.13

experience of having a “*resistance and resilience to be able to cope with stuff and just push through it*”. (Figure 4.13).

Senescence: The deteriorating and ageing body

Senescence is a term borrowed from evolutionary biology explaining the inevitable, time-dependent accumulation of damage at the molecular level (Carnes & Olshansky 1993, p. 795), or more simply referred to as *biological* ageing. A process that makes itself known via a changing and deteriorating body; wrinkles, grey hair, muscle atrophy and loss of mobility. An ominous signifier of helplessness and dependency (Paulson, 2005). Participants in this study actively seek to resist this process through the disciplinary effects of ultra-running. However, their attempts at running away from their ageing body are interrupted when injured. Injury forces them to confront embodied experiences of ageing, resulting in complex and fluctuating experiences of existential anxiety.

Within the Senescence plot we identified two subplots;

1. Running out of time
2. Playing with death

Running out of time

For several participants, injury signals a confronting awareness of a body that is ageing. Running represents a way to remain agile, powerful and youthful. An active resistance to a body weathered and worn down by life. However when injured, the corporeal and fleshy reality of a deteriorating body is met with experiences of existential angst. For some, the seduction of denial allows them to resist the inevitability of their ageing and failing body, at least for the time being. For these participants, a looming sense of running out of time shapes their subjectivities reproducing endurance and ‘digging in’ discourses (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2016).

For James, each decade is marked by an endurance running goal. A resistance to a body ravaged by another decade.

“I had a goal before I turned 40 to do a marathon”

A torn meniscus robbed James from completing his goal. Nearly a decade on and James invented another goal;

“With my 50th coming up I signed up for the 100km (UTA). Again, it’s like turning 50, I’m getting old and life is short”.

In between these goals when James' body provides him with the means to run, it transports him back to his youthful past;

"So this is dangerous territory for me. I start to think this is fun. I could go back to my youth when athletics was everything and I was the cross country captain at school".

The liminality of a suffering body that defies his youthful past, pressures James to confront new hopes and possibilities. A reluctance to submit to the carnal reality of his ageing lived body.

"I just want to be able to bush walk until I'm 80 or as old as I can"

Rick stated that he had researched the benefits of endurance running. Although admitting that endurance running may not be 'good' for the body and the heart, he reaches the conclusion that;

"I want to believe that I will live 15 years longer. I look 15 years younger than I am anyway".

For Rick, running provides the means to defer the inevitability of his mortality. A gift far worth the price of any physical damage endured in the process.

Naomi derives a sense of achievement and power from running fast. Injury forced her to flirt briefly with her ageing embodiment;

"I thought for a moment that at 41, have I reached my prime?"

Before returning to a corporeal experience defined through physical endurance discourses;

"I feel like my body is as strong as an ox, so I think there's still many years of running fast out of me yet."

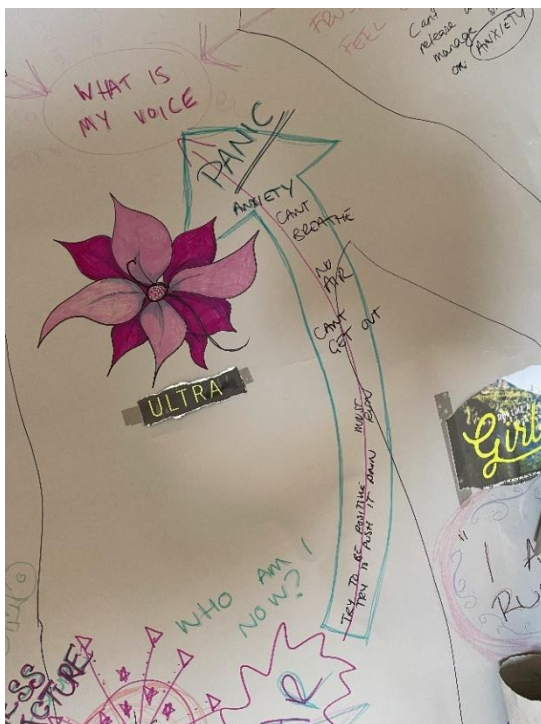


Figure 14

Naomi settles on the belief that after her hysterectomy she will return to her former running self because her injury *"is something else beyond any running control"*.

Lauren refers to a choice she made after several injuries to be a 'mature' runner, by resisting performance discourses and 'slowing down' her running pace to preserve a body that has weathered several injuries. In doing so, Lauren also hopes to slow down the process of ageing. A delicately drawn flower over her heart represents Lauren's love of ultra-running. Much like the body, an organic structure that also deteriorates with time (Figure 14).

Playing with Death

Being-toward-death is considered the most authentic human experience according to Heidegger (1978). While most dwell in forgetfulness, ultra-runners are confronted with their mortality through the anxiety attached to pain and injury.

Rick stated that the only two reasons he would pull out of a race is permanent injury or death. While in hospital following an acute respiratory event during one race, he thought *“I want to see my wife and kids. I don’t want to die”*.

For Rick, coming close to and avoiding permanent injury and death on several occasions throws him into an anxiety which he has become familiar with. A confrontation of choice, and taking ownership of his existence and being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1978).

Faced with the uncertainty of his injury, Rick began to contemplate what he described as the ‘*ultimate sacrifice*’ to continue running. A reminder of the one limit that cannot be surpassed (LeBreton, 2000).

“We’re not racing for cattle stations or anything it’s only for ourselves. So there is no point in going to the extreme of dying”.

Rick’s playful and sarcastic tone resembles a level of comfort and confidence in his choices, in seeing and avoiding his own mortality. However it is also a reminder of an inevitability that is too much to bear;

“I don’t think about being unable to run again, I just don’t go there”.

Chantel describes a body riddled with illness related impairments, from fibromyalgia and patellar tendinopathy to high blood pressure and heart problems. When she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia several years ago she was told by her medical specialist that *“if things don’t change you won’t make it to 50 years, and if you do you will be in a wheelchair unable to walk”*.

Chantel’s running journey is sustained by a desire to stay mobile and alive. For her running is a stark reminder of what she is actively resisting; a disabled body.

From literal death to a metaphorical death represented through the liminality of injury and an uncertain running future, several participants described an existential anxiety when the everyday absorption in, and familiarity of the world collapses (Heidegger, 1978).

A metaphoric death that waits for every athlete when they reach their peak and begin to decline (Guttman, 2001).

For Craig, COVID and injury have forced him to confront the limitations of an ageing body, and the possibility of a looming future with no ultra-running;

“So I’m 56 in 4 months, I think by 60 it could all be over”.

Despite a growing awareness of the limitations imposed by an ageing body, the body life transformation that running enabled Craig is a gift he is unwilling to give up;

“I can’t think about not being able to run. I’ve made it my life, it’s what I do with my friends on the weekend”.

For Naomi this resistance takes the form of hypothetical bargaining. Finding a physical pursuit to replace not being able to run.

“I’d go back to playing hockey if I couldn’t run. And if I couldn’t do that, I would have to find a new goal to excel at”.

Resisting the ageing body by submitting to performance discourses.

James’ realisation that *“life is getting short”* leads him to resist his ageing body, avoiding a metaphorical running death by finding any way to keep moving despite the ongoing pain in his knee.

“Right now I exercise 5 days a week, and the running is about three times a week. But the swelling is still there.”

Kelly on the hand, contemplates the possibility of a running death;

“I guess if I couldn’t run I would rebirth myself in some way”.

Kelly’s reference to rebirthing is a demonstration of her resilience and resistance developed through childhood trauma and relationship breakdowns. An ability to start all over again after trauma or loss.

4.7 Discussion

The aims of this study were to understand the socio-cultural discourses that are resisted and reinforced through ultra-runner’s experiences of pain and injury, and to identify difficult and/or hidden experiences that are revealed by pain and injury. Through the use of body mapping methods, embodied experiences of the injured and pained body revealed shifts in corporeal subjectivity. The visual maps allowed for a creative and reflexive process (Boydell, 2021), producing multiple subjectivities and experiences of liminality, denial, loss and existential angst.

Visual symbols convey meaning in ways that elude written or verbal expressions (Boydell, 2021). In the current study, these symbols were brought to life through verbal interviews and field notes. Visual arts based methods allow for the channelling of events and memories, including those that have been silenced by trauma, structural oppression (Orchard, 2017), or in this case injury.

Unlike traditional forms of research, art based methods are co-created and involve different stages of production allowing for multi layered meaning (Boydell, 2021; Orchard, 2017) and multiple embodied subjectivities (Braidotti, 1993). These methods also allow for deeply buried experiences to get ‘out’ and ‘down’ on the body map (Orchard, 2017). This is because the production of a life sized body map, delineates the boundary between the corporeal body and the image or signifier, creating safe access to embodied memories (Malecki et al, 2022).

We analysed and presented the data in three narrative master plot lines with eight subplots, representing participants’ embodied experiences and multiple shifting subjectivities. What follows is a theoretical discussion of these plot lines using a cultural phenomenological approach. This aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and his acknowledgment that experience is firmly situated within culture (Ponty, 2002).

For most participants, the meaning of running centres around a desire for transformation and a different way of being. For these people, running offered them a path towards a way of being perceived as more appealing and fulfilling. The search for an authentic self, from living inauthentically through discursively constructed cultural roles to do with parenting and family. Inauthenticity according to Heidegger refers to a way of being defined by social norms and cultural convention. While he describes this as both necessary and unavoidable, it can become unfitting and uncomfortable (Heidegger, 1978). When an individual’s relation to oneself is silent in this way, the meaningful, personal relationship to the world is missing and has not been realized (Koski, 2015). Through running, participants in this study discovered a different way of being. An exercise in search of authenticity, intentionality and of being present in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). When injured, this transformation towards authenticity is interrupted. From a way of being that (re)produces discursive notions of endurance and strength, participants revert to an overwhelming sense of liminality forcing them to confront their embodiment in nuanced ways. For some this means being pulled back to past pain and suffering while for others it provides an opportunity to reflect on what has been lost along the journey towards authenticity.

Participants describe an experience of disappearing into socio cultural norms and caregiving roles. In an embodied sense, this reflects Leder’s conceptualisations of the (dis)appearing body (Leder, 1990). The body-self backgrounded in the corporeal gestalt (Leder, 1990) while other functions move to the foreground enabling participation in ‘doing’ and caregiving roles. For some participants there is a suggestion of intentionality with this process, from bodies that have grown through pregnancy or weight gain becoming unfamiliar, to empty vessels bearing the scars of a former body full with life. Allowing the body to fade into the background is a way of neutralising the discomfort that comes from a body-self that is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and undesirable. Injury confronts this process, bringing the body back to the foreground. While bodily self-awareness is pre-reflective (Merleau-

Ponty, 2012) allowing us to move our bodies during activities, the injured body disrupts the person's mind-body-world relation. Not only is the injured body experienced as alien (Leder, 1990; Svenaeus, 2015), the entire experience of their world shifts (Charmaz, 1983) and becomes unfamiliar bringing forth past inauthentic and undesired ways of being.

This corporeal unfamiliarity is experienced by nearly all participants as a type of betrayal. From a body that is indelible and unproblematic (Gadow, 1982) and in a state of flow (Jackman et al, 2021), to a jarring unfamiliarity marked by liminality and pain. Through the layering of images and drawings participants expressed being confronted with their embodiment in ways that were not discursively expressed through the interviews. The reflexivity permitted through visual storytelling allowed the participants to tell a different story (Boydell, 2021), engaging in alternative corporeal subjectivities. This represented a point of divergence, as their narratives drew on discourses of endurance and strength and a desire to rebuild their failing body. A finding similar to the *Resilience Narrative* identified by Everard et al, (2023) in their research with injured track athletes and aligned with Frank's *Restitution Narrative* (Frank, 1995). Participant injury stories often became fixed on detailed journeys of repair and an unwavering desire to build an even stronger indelible body. As Koski (2015) suggests, the ultra-running body is an object-like pragmatic being which is thematized as the performer. The entrenched nature of this performance narrative creates a stifling context for other ways of approaching injury experiences (Everard et al, 2023). The body-as-machine becomes a convenient metaphor in this context, with a mechanistic view of the body enabling medical discourse to offer solutions to a broken body (Black, 2014). The machine metaphor also providing super human and desirable possibilities of endless youth and persisting strength.

While dominant narratives surrounding sport may restrict access to alternative narratives (Ronkainen et al, 2016), individuals are not passive in positioning themselves in discourses. The site of subjectivity one occupies in a discourse can be ascribed to individuals, limiting their possibilities to certain conventions as to how to feel, think and behave (Foucault, 1983).

There is a question as to whether discursive subjectivity was ascribed to participants in the present study. Specifically, body mapping as co-creation meant that the first author shared their experiences of running in a purposeful way to share vulnerability and open meaningful and power leveling interactions (Orchard, 2017). While this appeared to enable participants to open up and share their own experiences it may have restricted and ascribed subjectivity, causing participants to purposefully channel their performative narratives into dominant running discourses.

In contrast, by emplacing their experiences onto their body map participants visual stories reflected a revolving story of the self (Everard et al, 2023). Flickering experiences of pain, grief and loss, were layered with sharp and confronting representations of past trauma and suffering. Windows into former ways of being were positioned onto parts of the body where physical pain was located creating a fluid

temporal shifting between current and past experiences of pain. While the verbal narratives seemed to adhere to dominant and performative athletic discourse, the body maps gave 'voice' to hidden and inaccessible embodied experiences of pain and suffering.

While the body maps provided visual insights into temporal fluidity between the here and now, their verbal narratives became pre-occupied with an ageing awakening. A linear experience of time, leading towards a deteriorating body and eventual non-existence. According to Heidegger (1978) death is the most authentic human experience; an experience that allows humans to see their own existence on the basis of non-existence.

The average age of participants in this study was 47yrs, with the oldest and most experienced being 57yrs. All were at a point in their lives where they were reflecting on former youthful selves from rearing children, to career changes and moving countries. It has been widely acknowledged that *midlife*, occurring between the ages of 40-60 presents an ambiguous status, an important transitional period when the practices that mark social identity in youth are challenged by Western culture (Schwaiger, 2009; Gullette, 1998). As a culture that valorises youthfulness, the visual signs of ageing are marks of disruption and the body's failure to properly signify a gendered agelessness (Schwaiger, 2009).

The ageing medicalized body in this sense represents a dualistic determinism, with the body rendered in isolation from the self. Under this process, ageing can be experienced as an ominous signifier of helplessness and dependency (Paulson, 2005). Participants in this study appeared to position their ageing bodies as adversaries subjected to the inevitability of deterioration and at some point death. For one participant in particular flirting with death is a reminder of their existence and of a choice to overcome the inevitable. For these participants, running represents a way to resist biological ageing, producing a tension between the material body and embodied subjectivity (Featherstone et al, 1991). This tension became foregrounded through injury. As their injury confronted them with an ageing body, participants responded in various ways. Some choosing to continue resisting the ageing process by focussing on a quick return to running, while for others, the tension forcing them to confront the inevitability of ageing with a corporeal awareness. For the latter, this awareness was met with loss and uncertainty throwing some into a chaos narrative (Frank, 1995). In his narrative typology Frank refers to the Chaos narrative as a realisation that things are unlikely to improve or get better (Frank, 1995). This anti-narrative of time without sequence was certainly observed when participants spoke about their experiences of injury. The injury experience characterised by temporal shifting and distortion, with the jarring immediacy of their experience dominating the narrative. An experience also noted by Allen Collinson in her research about the temporal dimensions of sporting injury (Allen Collinson, 2003). However, for the participants in this study, subjective experiences of *chaos* brought about by injury appear to be due (at least in part) to a corporeal awareness of ageing. Frank states that

the person living in chaos cannot tell it in words (Frank, 1995). As such, participants' experiences of injury-related chaos were represented in their body maps through the use of bright and contrasting colours, and large dramatic free drawn lines and shapes over the top of each other suggesting a loss of control.

While the hope is that participants are able to exercise corporeal agency by somewhat embracing the ageing process, the question is whether this is possible given the normative enactments of age which perpetuate the status quo. According to Sullivan (2000), we can reconfigure our culture through the ways we embody it. Given the fact that participants were interviewed at the time of injury or shortly afterwards, it would be interesting to understand how this process evolves. Specifically whether it holds promise for an alternative and ethically productive embodied understanding of old age (Schwaiger, 2009).

In this study we interviewed eight ultra-runners using a combination of semi-structured interviews and Body Mapping techniques. Analysis and results identified three master plot lines with eight subplots woven throughout each interview. To date, this is the first study to employ these techniques and theoretical analysis with ultra-runners.

This study provides valuable insight into the shifting subjectivities of these athletes when confronted with injury. Drawn into discursive athletic performance narratives, participants were able to access different stories told through body maps. The jarring experience of injury forced most participants to confront their embodiment in various ways, producing multiple subjectivities to reflect the liminality and unfamiliarity of their experiences. Body mapping lends itself to the exploration of sensory and psychological experience (Boydell, 2021), opening up creative spaces within which we were able to understand the experiences of being in the world for these participants (Orchard, 2017). Participants embraced the opportunity to explore embodied experiences of liminality, uncertainty, grief and loss to come to the surface making visible the invisible (Boydell, 2021).

Running occurs in space and place. Nearly all participants reflected on the themes of freedom and nature when running. Exploring ultra-runner's embodied experiences of place was beyond the scope of this study, however could be a consideration for future research. Running bodies and notions of nature are suggested to be co-produced blurring the distinction between the social and natural (Howe & Morris, 2009). The ultra-runners' relationship and 'oneness' with nature, and whether this blurred distinction mediates their response to injury would be an interesting topic for future research.

Finally, participants in this study were all from Sydney, Australia with many moving to Australia from England. All were white middle class athletes, representative of the neoliberalism often associated with the sport of ultra-running (Bridel et al, 2016). Critically, much more research is needed to reflect the diversity of culture and conditions within this sport. Researchers should take this into consideration when designing future studies.

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Chapter 5

General Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore the embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners. Specifically, the embodied meaning these athletes make from pain and injury and their associated shifts in corporeal subjectivities filtered through socio-cultural discourse. Study 1 made a unique theoretical contribution to the existing literature by (re)positioning the injury experiences of ultra-runners into an embodied framework (Chapter 2). The second study identified existing research about the experiences of injured ultra-runners, and via qualitative meta synthesis reorganised their experiences around an embodied theoretical framework (Chapter 3). The final study used two sets of empirical data to understand the embodied experiences of eight injured ultra-runners (Chapter 4). In this study narrative interviews were combined with detailed body maps forming narrative plot lines, woven throughout the merged visual and verbal stories creating embodied stories of liminality, endurance, suffering and healing. This chapter will summarise the findings of these studies and discuss both the theoretical and practical implications for ultra-running and endurance sport more generally. It will include a reflection on the emancipatory benefits of arts based research methods in holding space for participants to resist dominant discourse and explore their embodied subjectivities. Finally, it will include a discussion of both the strengths and limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research.

5.2 Summary of findings

The purpose of the theory paper (Chapter 2) was to (re)position the injury experience of ultra-runners within an embodied theoretical framework. A resistance to positivist medical discourse, this paper highlighted the lure of biomedical meaning making and the power dynamics inherent within the medical profession when an athlete experiences an injury. By focusing on the criticisms of this approach it brought forward the work of Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault, placing corporeal subjectivity at the centre of the injured athletes experience. It was highlighted that research in this area is extremely limited, with the vast majority of research submitting to positivist and dualistic notions of mind versus body.

The qualitative meta synthesis (Chapter 3) located existing research about the experiences of injured ultra-runners. Following a hermeneutic analysis of the ten interview studies using meta-ethnography, these experiences were reorganised around an embodiment framework resulting in five taxonomies.

The disciplined body, embodied distress, corporeal running identity, intersubjectivity of pain and embodied coping. These taxonomies explored the ways these injured athletes resist and submit to various discourses positioning embodied subjective experience within a socio-cultural context. Adopting a theoretical interpretation of themes as opposed to a thematic synthesis, allowed for an inductively driven theory of process grounded in the interview material. The paper concludes by suggesting that future research should focus on the embodied experiences of these injured athletes, and draw on research methods that centre corporeal subjectivity.

The Body Mapping paper (Chapter 4) presents an embodied response to the previous two papers (Chapter 2 & 3) by merging two distinct but related forms of qualitative data. The aims were to understand the socio-cultural discourses resisted and reinforced through ultra-runners' experiences of pain and injury and to identify difficult or hidden experiences revealed through pain and injury. Eight injured ultra-runners were interviewed about their running and injury experiences. Next, they were invited to co-produce an artwork involving a life sized body map. Participants emplaced their experiences onto their artworks producing multiple layers of embodied storytelling. While the interview positioned the participant within their injury experience, it elicited a multilayered body map with visual stories of corporeal subjectivity, liminality, healing and suffering. The maps also provided a window into former ways of being, with experiences of past pain and trauma brought to the forefront through physical injury. Plot lines were woven through the visual and textual material. Stories of body-self transformation, the body-as-machine and the ageing body were captured through combining the narrative data and body maps. The paper includes a discussion about the points of divergence between the interviews and artworks, with the visual body maps holding space for participants to explore the invisible parts of themselves. Drawn into discursive athletic performance narratives, participants were able to access different stories told through body maps.

In summary, this thesis has provided an alternative theoretical contribution about the experiences of injured ultra-runners. One that resists dominant medical discourse, by centring the embodied experiences of these athletes and providing them with an opportunity to explore their shifting subjectivities. While nearly all participants found themselves submitting to athletic discourses of endurance and strength during their narrative interviews, their body maps allowed for a multilayered representation of lived experience.

5.3 Theoretical and practical Implications

While the theory paper provided an alternative (embodied) frame for understanding the experiences of injured ultra-runners (Chapter 2), the meta synthesis concluded that further research about the embodied experiences of these athletes is needed (Chapter 3). The Body Mapping paper provided an innovative response to this, suggesting that pain and injury forces these athletes to confront their

embodiment in ways that narrative story-telling does not (Chapter 4). In doing so this thesis has made a unique and significant contribution towards understanding the subjective experiences of these athletes. What follows is a discussion about the theoretical implications for research about embodiment in a sporting context, the practical implications of this for ultra-running, and for endurance sport more generally, as well as the implications for healing and recovery within a medical discourse that constructs a path towards a mechanistic view of the body.

Research about the body in a sporting context dates back to the work of researchers such as Turner (1984). In 2011, Allen Collinson in her research about long distance running identified a lack of research at that time about the body in an *embodied* sense in sport. Prior to her work, and the work of Hanold (2010), the body was positioned as a subject and adversary to be manipulated and worked on (discussed in Chapter 4). Although subsequent research has begun to address embodied experience in sport, methods of inquiry have predominantly focused on narrative inquiry, ethnography and similar forms of storytelling with researchers dissecting these experiences to identify patterns and themes. This thesis has adopted an embodied method of inquiry by merging verbal and visual material to create rich and layered stories. Rather than dissecting the narratives of these eight participants, their experiences were kept whole. The use of plot lines, woven throughout the merged visual and verbal material enabled embodied lived experience to be foregrounded and centered. This has significant theoretical implications for how subjective experience can be accessed and understood in an embodied sense. By adopting methods that allow for multilayered storytelling, in ways that allow participants to access and make sense of complex lived experience the sporting research world can begin to push back on positivist and reductionist forms of research inquiry that seek to make lived experience both invisible and invalid. Only then can discourse begin to shift away from performance driven and medical narratives of ableism, mental endurance and suffering and towards an embodied acknowledgment and appreciation of the many disciplinary forces at work in the sporting world. The latter, allowing injured athletes to make informed choices about what they resist and submit to.

When injured ultra-runners were asked open ended questions about their running and injury experience (Chapter 4), they all leaned into endurance and strength discourses in an active demonstration of their membership to a sporting community that reinforces belonging and acceptance through shared experiences of suffering. The addition of body mapping as a method of capturing the complexities of lived experience, provided opportunities for different story-telling told through images and artwork (Chapter 4). By resisting positivist discourse, this research has opened up new and different ways of understanding how these athletes respond to pain and injury. By moving away from dualistic notions of ableism, it suggests that injury can open up and offer new ways of being. This is in stark contrast to previously held notions of suffering brought about by a discourse that defines injury as a broken body-machine. While medical professionals tend to focus on fixing the body-machine, first person body alienation causes the patient to surrender their own narrative in

favour of the ‘expert’ (Frank, 1985). Alternatively, this thesis suggests that connecting and engaging with subjective embodied experience offers alternative healing pathways. This finding may assist injured ultra-runners in their healing journey, by encouraging them to tune into their embodied experiences instead of surrendering their narrative and submitting to medical discourse.

While this thesis focused on injured ultra-runners, the implications may extend to the broader endurance sporting community; for example ultra-swimming, long course triathlon, and endurance road cycling. While research has focused somewhat on the disciplinary forces that these athletes submit to (see McNarry et al 2020, as an example), exploring their embodied experiences when injured may open up new possibilities for healing beyond ‘fixing’ the injured or broken body. These dualisms perpetuate an ‘otherness’ that pressures the athlete into persisting with a linear journey towards repair. This research suggests that this causes further body alienation as well as a distrust of the body (discussed in Chapter 4). This information may be useful for medical professionals such as sports physicians and physiotherapists in informing how they work with endurance athletes. Supporting their patients to remain connected to their embodied experience could result in a more positive experience for the patient, as well as increased treatment compliance and embodied healing as defined by the patient rather than the medical ‘expert’.

5.4 Arts Based Research Methods and Embodied Healing

Art allows for a reflexivity and layered co-creation of meaning, which is vastly different to traditional forms of scientific inquiry. It enables embodied connection and transition, through the process of its creation and the capacity to see *the self*, substituted into a creative artefact (Eaves, 2014). This was observed in the body mapping study (Chapter 4) as many participants expressed surprise at seeing their body represented on paper, suggestive of a connection and transition towards an unexplored embodied self. Art as an aesthetic experience also offers transformative power which can modify our habitual ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving (Jackson, 1998). Habitual ways of thinking that are dominated by constructions of the self, embedded in socio-cultural discourse. It offers new possibilities for discovery of self and others and an opportunity to move into new cultural spaces of understanding, resistance and hope (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012. p. 257). For ultra-running and other forms of endurance activity art itself offers participants pathways to new ways of knowing and being, emancipated from cultural discourses to do with sporting performance and dualistic notions of mind over body. In doing so it provides opportunities for resistance and access to embodied healing processes, by centring the body and acknowledging the situatedness of lived and living experience.

In a research sense, arts based research is a process that uses the expressive qualities of form to convey meaning, to enlarge human understanding, to disrupt and reconcile and to develop an empathic participation (Barone & Eisner, 2012). By enabling an exploration of a phenomenologically-

grounded account of the body, it opens up new forms of knowledge about the body in sport. As it serves to *evoke* meanings not denote them (Leavy, 2009), it holds space for lived and living experience. This process allows for a blurring of discipline boundaries and builds layers and interconnection (Roberts, 2008). As a methodology, it answers the call for a more corporeal and fleshy account of the sporting body (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2009).

Arts based research also gives voice and supports the enablement of participants by fostering polyphony, surfacing the intangible and invisible and optimising the capacity for authenticity in representation (Eaves, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 4, participant body maps revealed past experiences and former ways of being as well as current experiences of liminality. These authentic experiences forming part of a polyphony about shifting embodied subjectivities. Visual narrative inquiry also enables both researchers and participants to explore and make meaning of experience across visual and narrative dimensions within their environment (Reissman, 2008). The researcher in this sense becomes an active part of the meaning making process.

Researcher identity is normatively a cognitive construct, rather than an embodied one (Turner & Norwood, 2013). The body mapping process acknowledges bodily aspects and spatial relations between both the participant and researcher (Wainwright et al, 2018) in ways that other research methods do not. Tracing a person's body requires the person to lie down while the researcher stands or kneels above and traces around the entire body. This process requires being in close proximity, meaning that my body also became unexpectedly foregrounded through corporeal immediacy. While it has been suggested that researchers have bodies that should be acknowledged (Ellingson, 2006), the body mapping process highlighted an ontological anxiety of my own placed body, based around constructed notions of femininity, and researcher professionalism (Wainwright et al, 2018). In response, I found myself working hard to cultivate spaces of emotional and physical safety for both myself and the participant. For example, explaining the process in detail, pausing for questions and clarification and asking for consent at each step during the mapping process. I was also mindful of how I dressed, remaining casual in an attempt to resist power hierarchies. Being physically comfortable also became important so that I could convey a sense of embodied casual ease for the participant throughout the research process.

Reflecting about bodies in a general sense during this research process as being where meaning and understanding is experienced, created knowledge about myself and my identity as a researcher. Remaining connected to my own embodied experiences during the research process served as a reminder that researcher identity is never bounded or controlled (Wainwright et al, 2018). As such, by scaffolding a rich polyphonic understanding, and promoting awareness and sensitivity to different perspectives, arts based methods of inquiry support a cohabitative appreciation of different ways of knowing (Eaves, 2013).

5.5 Resisting neutrality: On being an inside researcher.

As stated in Chapter 4, my decision to reveal my own running history was made in the interests of co-production, and in response to being directly asked by the participants. As an experienced psychologist I was also responsive to a perceived desire for each participant to feel heard and validated. A pre-conception derived from my own experiences and the literature about sporting injury. In line with the views of Heidegger (1962), rather than attempting to 'bracket out' these pre-conceptions I remained connected to them, and conscious of their intrusion and contribution.

Acknowledging and valuing the influence of an internal researcher is a stark contrast to the views inherent within traditional scientific research where researcher objectivity is a requirement and condition. In phenomenological research however, the question about whether researchers can or should 'bracket' out their own experiences and preconceptions when doing research has been widely discussed. *Bracketing* is a method used by some researchers to mitigate the effects of unacknowledged preconceptions, thereby increasing research rigour (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

However according to Heidegger (1962), bracketing out preconceptions equates to a form of phenomenological reductionism and is therefore not possible. By adopting a position of *being in the world*, Heidegger unlike his predecessor Husserl (1859-1938) argued that contextual understanding is both important and valued. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty extends this argument further by suggesting that perception and experience is firmly situated within a socio-cultural context, and that the self, other and the world are relational and interdependent at an ontological level (Daly, 2014). This thesis adopts Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's position, making the assumption that the researcher is always situated within the research process, rejecting any false sense of objectivism or neutrality. As suggested by Rose (1985), there is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. In this research I remained actively connected to my inner experiences, biases and reactions. This awareness enabled me to hold space for the participant stories, allowing a polyphony as opposed to a singular voice (such as my own) dominating the narrative plot lines.

As I collected more data, and interviewed more participants, I became aware of my own shifting subjectivity. While most of the participants I interviewed were oscillating between liminality and a desire to return to their former running selves, I began moving away from mine despite the fact that I had not experienced a recent injury. Their stories sat with me and resonated in ways I did not expect or anticipate. Immersing myself in their visual stories required me to confront my own embodiment. Through this process I was able to experience the emancipation from the disciplinary forces about ultra-running. Forces that I felt these participants were either submitting to or attempting to resist. Similar experiences have been described by arts based researchers in particular, acknowledging that our own world views and life experiences impact our work, and the process by which we engage with our research and what we learn from it also transforms us (Osei-Kofi, 2013). Being aware of my own

internal environment meant that I was able to separate my experiences from the participants as much as possible. During this time I was also engaging with dialogical practices through my paid work, via a combination of open dialogue training and lived experience peer work in the youth mental health space. I believe that the principles of mutuality, dialogism, and polyphony within the practice of open dialogue managed to permeate my research in ways that helped me position myself within the research while privileging and elevating the voices and lived experiences of the participants. In addition, regular conversations with my supervisor, having him cross check during the data analysis phase, and provide constructive feedback and comments during the preparation of the manuscript in Chapter 4, also ensured that boundaries were clear.

Within qualitative research more generally, discussions about the role of researchers engaging in observational methods have involved the identification of certain ‘roles’. These involve peripheral member researchers, active member researchers and complete member researchers (Adler & Adler, 1987). In this thesis, the researcher role best resembles the *active member researcher*, meaning that although I began the research journey involved in similar activities to the group, sharing the research members values and goals, I did not entirely commit to them (Adler & Adler, 1987).

5.6 Ethical considerations

When reflecting on the strengths and limitations of this research, it became apparent that the phrase itself is embedded within a traditional scientific discourse of objective positivism. Through this lens, the limitations would include discussions about the relatively small sample size, and the intentional deviation from standard ‘protocols’ with regard to methodological processes. However the practical and theoretical contributions of this research draw their strengths from existing outside this discourse, and are situated firmly within a post-positivist and phenomenological framework. As such, what follows is a discussion about the ethical considerations of doing research that is not constrained by the limitations imposed by traditional scientific methods of inquiry.

There are several ethical considerations when it comes to arts based research methods. For example, questions about who owns the artwork, and informed consent and confidentiality given the artworks tend to ‘emerge’ as participants begin to explore their embodied selves (Boydell et al, 2012). While these considerations were addressed through the requirements set out by the University Ethics Committee, arts based research methods can evoke strong and sometimes distressing emotions (Boydell et al, 2012). A couple of participants in this study did speak about past experiences of pain and trauma. These experiences were revealed through the chosen methods of research inquiry, enabling access to former selves and past experiences of pain. They were not at any point directly asked about or questioned. As an experienced psychologist, I was able to gently navigate these conversations by holding space for them to be expressed by the participant ensuring that my

psychologist self was kept out of the interaction. This meant that I refrained from asking further intruding questions about their story allowing them to emplace their experiences onto their artworks in an authentic and uninterrupted way.

Arts based methods can initially be intimidating for some people. In particular, those who are self-conscious or lack confidence in their artistic ability can find participating in this type of research uncomfortable. Engaging the creative aspect of the brain to gather research data also challenges dominant positivist attitudes towards research. Several participants in the body mapping study expressed hesitancy at the beginning of the process. By holding space for this discomfort, and allowing participants to take their time while offering for them to take the body-home home to complete, I removed the researcher-observer element and enabled creative spaces to open up naturally as opposed to pressuring the participants with time frames and rigid expectations.

Another consideration relates to the reflexivity of the research methodologies used in this research. Recognised as a method that bridges the gaps between biomedical systems, popular knowledge and lived experience (Cornwall, 2002), attempts have been made to standardise the body mapping approach beginning with Solomon's body mapping facilitation guide (2002) and more recently the body mapping research protocol proposed by Gaete et al (2023). However, a strength of this methodology lies in its ability to be reflexive to the needs of the participants and topic under investigation (Boydell et al, 2021). Although this has been raised as a limitation by some (see Orchard, 2017) others provide examples of how being responsive and adapting to the needs of those participating generates a more meaningful engagement with the topic (Boydell et al, 2021). While this raises the question of research rigour, providing a clear framework for how data is gathered, interpreted and analysed as well as making conclusions explicit, replicable and open to critique, means that this type of research has considerable rigour (Johnson et al, 2020). Further, in qualitative research reflexivity and researcher insight into their own biases and decision making is considered an essential component of research rigour (Johnson et al, 2020). As such, this research demonstrates rigour through the points discussed by Johnson et al (2020).

Not much is known about the embodied experiences of researchers. While this appears to be relatively new terrain, there is the potential for ethical issues. Specifically, considering the place, materiality and effect of one's own body as researcher raises questions of power, hierarchies and reciprocity (Wainwright et al, 2018). While I did make every effort to remain connected to my own embodiment throughout the research process, I did not ask participants about the impact of my own embodied experience on them and the research process. It is possible that this impacted them in ways that influenced their own meaning making. Similarly, while the use of researcher self-disclosure has been described as a useful strategy for managing unequal power relations inherent within an interview interaction (Abel et al, 2006), there are ethical considerations and potential limitations with this

approach. While the positioning of the interviewer in relation to the respondent has been a key concern in the research, self-disclosure as an intentional research strategy (as in Chapter 4) is less understood (Abel et al, 2006). However, it has been suggested that in attempting to demonstrate ‘doing similarly’ this strategy may display an interviewer’s greater category entitlement and also contribute to the respondent feeling unclear about their role in the interaction (Abel et al, 2006). My own attempt at ‘doing similarly’ (in Chapter 4) may have resulted in participants needing to re-assert their knowledge, unknowingly drawing them into submitting to discursive and performative constructions of ‘being an ultra-runner’. In doing so, they were able to (re)establish themselves as experts.

Finally, in this research participants were all middle aged white ultra-runners residing in Sydney, Australia (discussed in Chapter 4). Ultra-running has been positioned as a neoliberal endeavour within a capitalist economy and an individual response to social factors and forces (Hall, 2020). While the participants in this study seem representative of a neo-liberal population, they do not represent the diversity required to make encompassing statements and conclusions which is a limitation of this research. In addition, two runners sustained injuries that were not directly due to running. It is unclear whether their experiences were qualitatively different to those who were injured **because of** running. Further research should consider the etiological differences in type of injury.

One of the strengths of this research is the perceived benefit of s of body mapping to participants. This includes developing a richer awareness and thicker life narrative, facilitating access to process content and experiences unavailable through verbal means alone, and encouraging the integration of experiences into a coherent sense of self (White & Epsom, 1990). As a process that situates experience within a socio-cultural context, it also provides an opportunity for resistance and emancipation (Boydell et al, 2021). Participants in this research demonstrated an active resistance to disciplinary ultra-running forces through their body maps, while simultaneously submitting to performative verbal narratives. These two sets of data together highlight the complexity of experience brought about by injury for these athletes, and represents another strength of this study. The fact that their stories were kept ‘whole’ as opposed to dissected and coded as in traditional forms of narrative thematic analysis, meant that the analysis represented an authentic embodied co-creation of meaning demonstrated through the use of narrative plot lines.

In addition, the use of art invites the viewer to interact with representations in ways that involve the senses, emotions and ideas (Greenwood, 2019). As such, it means that research findings have a broader reach though their embodied impact on the viewer/reader. In combining this information with verbal data, the lived and living experience of participants in this study (Chapter 4) was captured in a holistic and uninterrupted way thus contributing to a more authentic knowledge production.

5.7 Future Directions

Future research may refer to this thesis as a resistance to more traditional scientific and objective forms of inquiry. This should encourage further exploration of the embodied subjectivities of the injured sporting body. The qualitative meta-synthesis (Chapter 3) identified a lack of research about the embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners. While the body mapping study (Chapter 4) provided an initial response to this, future studies could expand on these findings with more culturally diverse populations in addition to moving beyond ultra-running towards other sporting experiences including elite sport. While this thesis focused on the disciplinary effects of particular discourses emerging from the experiences of the athletes themselves, understanding the impacts of other discourses, such as feminism, sexuality and neoliberalism would also be an interesting focus for future research as they relate to experiences of the injured sporting body.

As stated in Chapter 4, exploring the injured ultra-runners embodied experiences of space was beyond the scope of this research. However given the way these athletes describe their relationship with nature and space, further exploration of the ways these experiences intersect with athletes embodied subjectivities would be interesting and could also include experiences of climate change and *solastalgia*, or the pain or distress caused by the ongoing loss of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory (Albrecht, 2019, p. 38). As athletes who describe a deep connection with nature, spending a considerable amount of time navigating and exploring the outdoors, understanding their embodied experiences of these changing landscapes would be an interesting topic of research.

Finally, while this thesis explored the experiences of recently injured ultra-runners, longitudinal data could contribute further knowledge about how these athletes continue to navigate their life after injury. Of particular interest would be athletes who either choose to move away from ultra-running or are perhaps forced to through injury.

5.8 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, by using a combination of research methods to explore the embodied experiences of injured ultra-runners this thesis has made a unique contribution to furthering our understanding about the injured sporting body from a lived and living experience perspective. It highlights the emancipatory benefits of utilising methods of research that move beyond analysing discursive constructions of the self, centred around powerful narratives of strength, endurance and performance. This thesis has revealed how alternative methods of knowledge co-production are able to make unique contributions to existing research. Research that extends and develops this knowledge could cause a

seismic shift in the way athletes navigate injury, and also potentially create alternative discourses that seek to dismantle the power hierarchies inherent within medical and ableist narratives.

5.9 References

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Ethics approval confirmation letter



**Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 17 December 2020

Assoc Prof Paul Rhodes
Psychology; Faculty of Science
Email: p.rhodes@sydney.edu.au

Dear Paul,

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.
I am pleased to inform you that after consideration of your response, your project has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2020/750
Project Title: Ultra-running and Injury: A Body Mapping Study
Authorised Personnel: Rhodes Paul; Hall Leanne; Papathomas Anthony;
Approval Period: 17/12/2020 to 17/12/2024
First Annual Report Due: 17/12/2021

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version Number	Document Name
11/12/2020	Version 3	Participant information sheet V3
11/12/2020	Version 2	Facebook Advertisement
25/11/2020	Version 2	Participant Consent Form

Special Condition/s of Approval

- It is a condition of approval that the researchers should not need to visit people's homes to collect body maps that have been taken home by participants. The current script says: "There is no pressure to finish your map today, you can take it home with you if you like. I will then arrange a time to collect it from you (or you can bring it back to Sydney University) in a few days." The committee requires the script to instead say something like "...home with you if you like. You can bring it back to Sydney University in a few days."

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
 - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
 - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
Research Portfolio
Level 3, F23 Administration Building
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9036 9161
E human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
W sydney.edu.au/ethics

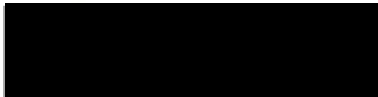
ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.
- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,



Associate Professor Carolyn Maccann
Chair
Psychology Review Committee (Low Risk)

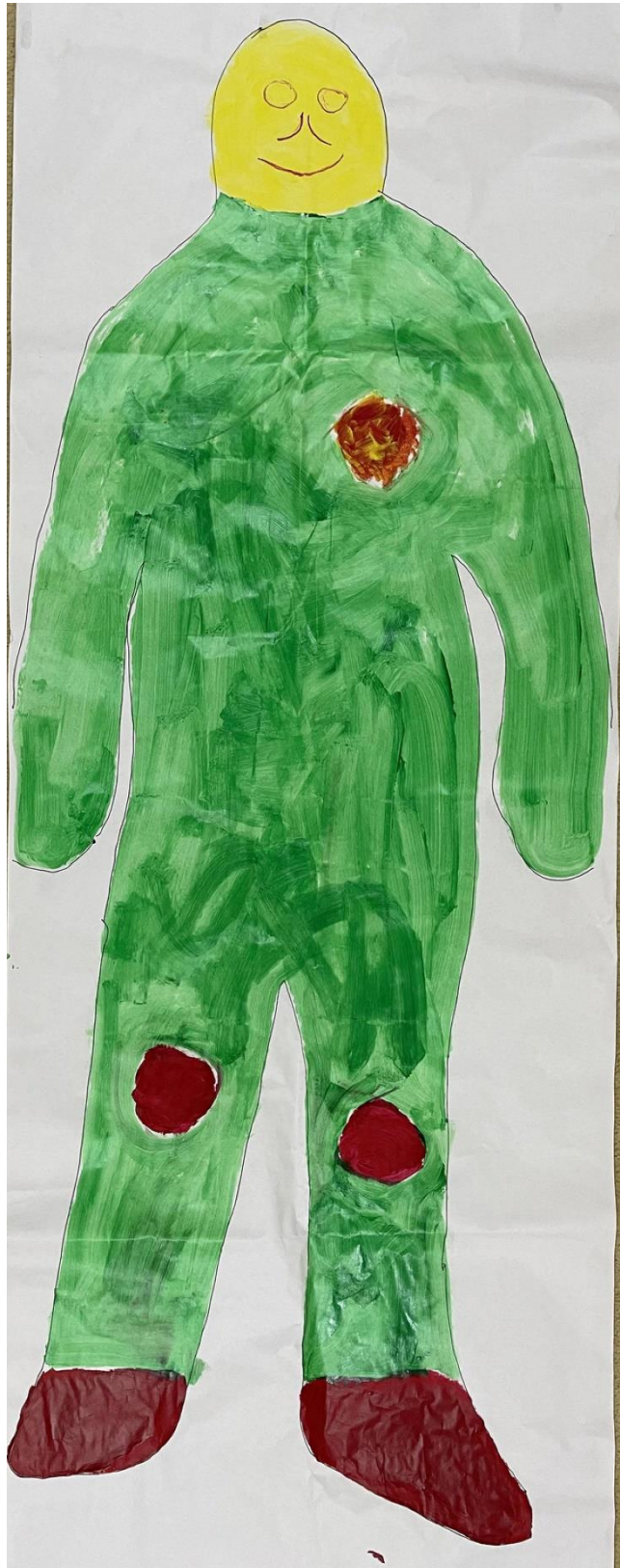
Appendix B.

James Body Map



Appendix C.

Craig Body Map

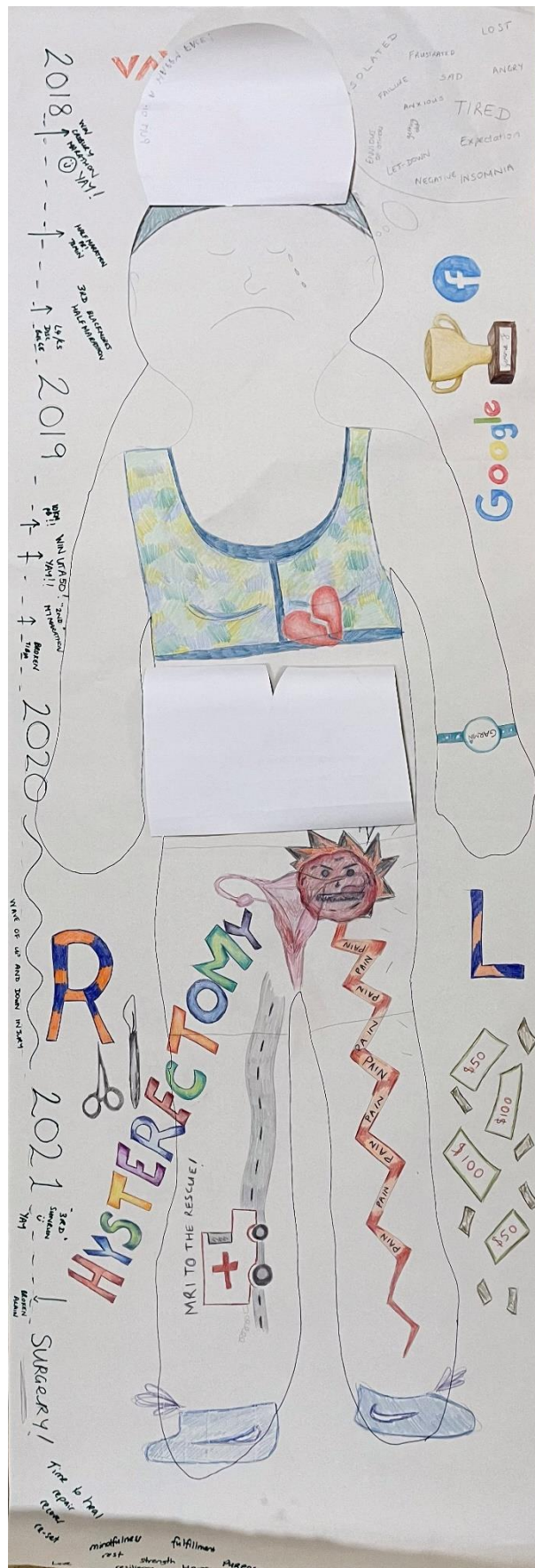


Appendix D.

Naomi Body Map (a)



Naomi Body Map (b)



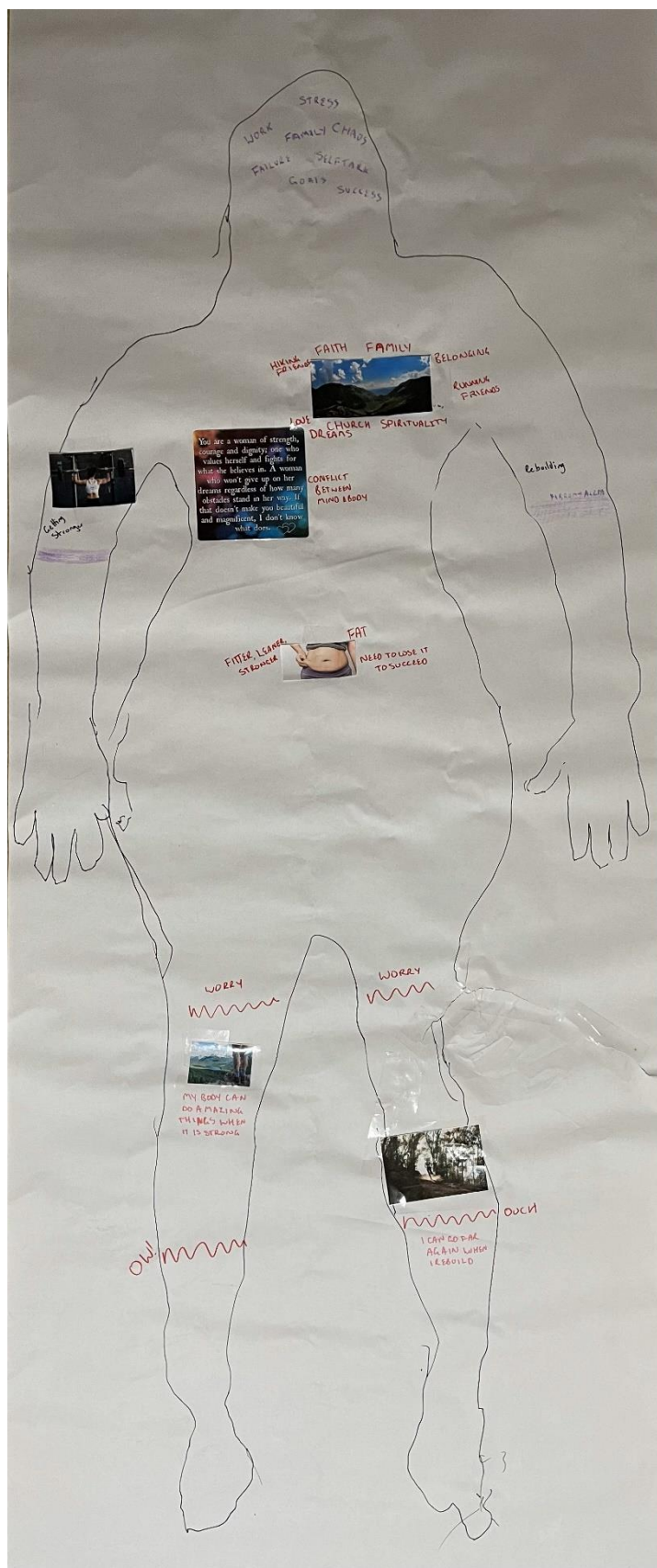
Appendix E.

Lisa Body Map

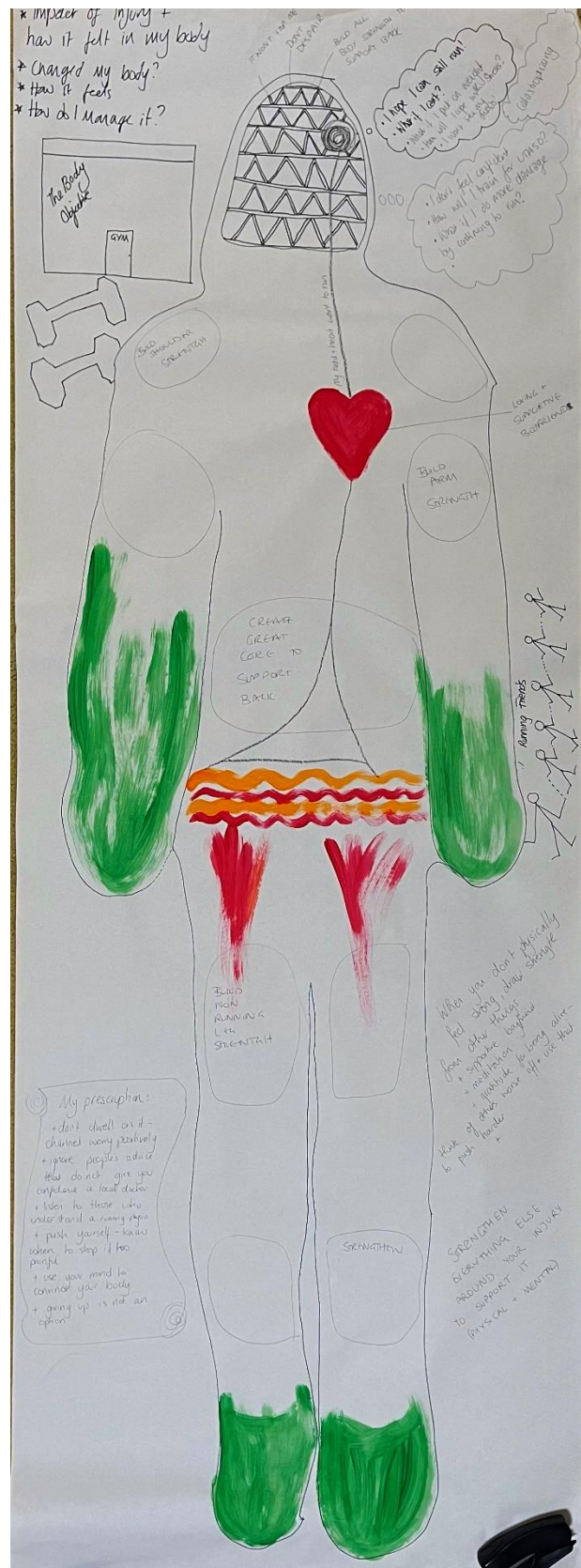


Appendix F.

Chantel Body Map

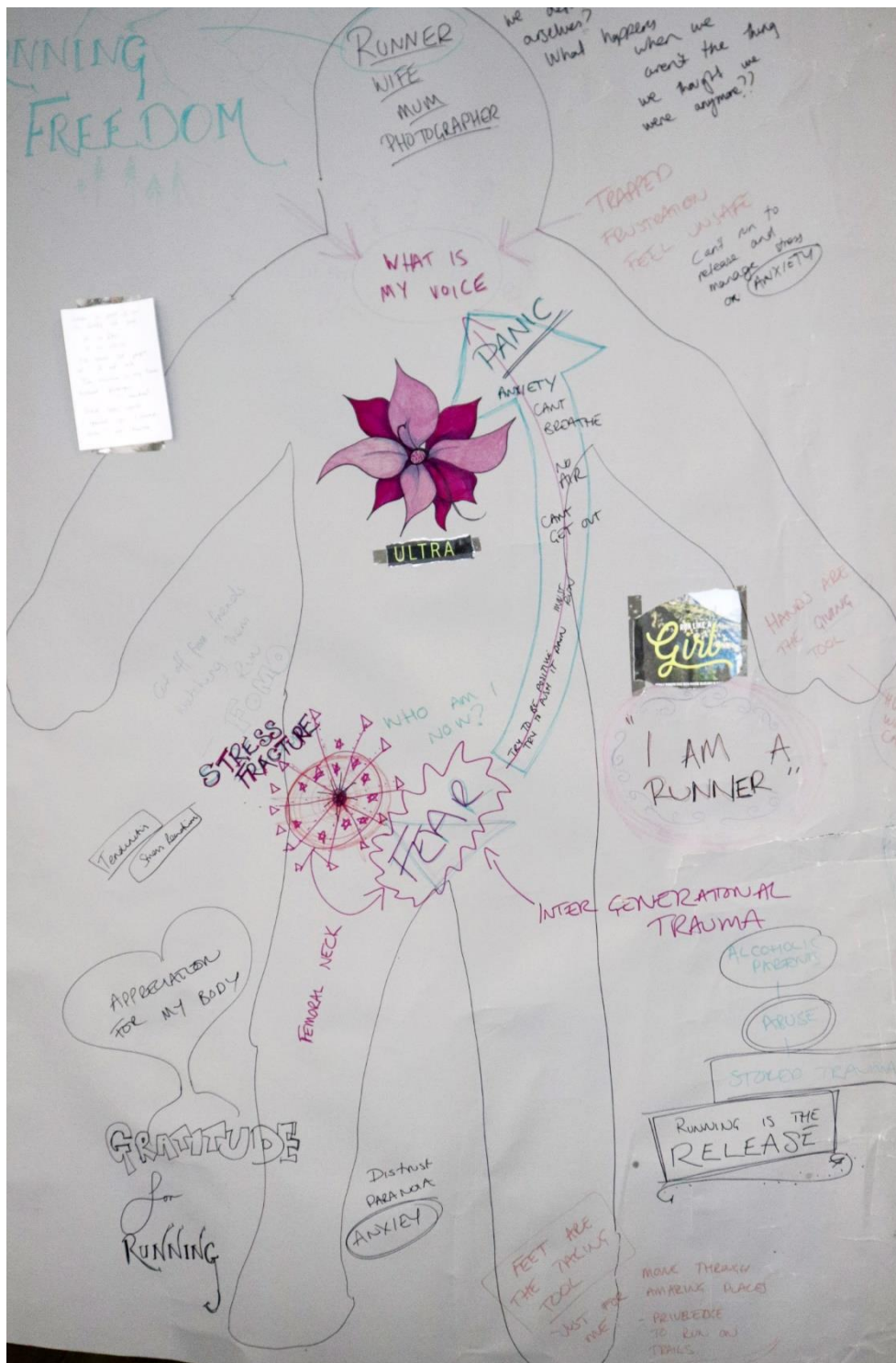


Kelly Body Map



Appendix H.

Lauren Body Map



Appendix I.

Rick Body Map

Appendix J.

Copy of Chapter;

Hall, L. (2020). More Than Mechanics: Injury, Running, and Healing. In: Rhodes, P. (eds) *Beyond the Psychology Industry*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33762-9_10

More Than Mechanics: Injury, Running, and Healing

Leanne Hall

Why Ultra-Running?

Ultra-runners represent a particular subculture of runners. They train for events exceeding the marathon distance of 42.2 km, ranging from 50 km to events of several hundred kilometres over several days. Many ultra-running events take place on trails, with challenging altitude and terrain. For many of these runners, being confronted with the question “why?” is common. Understanding why a person would endure running for these distances equates to a comprehension of the purpose, or seeking to understand the meaning that these athletes ascribe to their running. While on the surface, many identify concepts such as a sense of achievement, learning about physical limits, and demonstrating mental “toughness” as possible reasons (Roebuck, Fitzgerald, Urquhart, Ng, & Cicuttini, 2018), Billy Yang, ultra-runner and filmmaker, suggests something much more in his documentary about competing in the Leadville 100-mile race in 2018.

There was a time where we didn’t know where our next meal was coming from. I wonder how far removed we have become from who we once were; such as hunter and gatherers. Bodies and will hardened by constant movement. Driven by the simple need to survive. How far have we softened? Yet here I am surrounded by hundreds of runners, my like-minded tribe about to set forth into the mountains for 100 miles, seeking something through the discomfort. The unknown. But what exactly are we seeking? (Yang, 2018)

How far have we softened? What are we seeking? For those of us living in neoliberal society, how much of our day-to-day existence involves *avoiding* both physical and emotional discomfort? In fact, it could be argued that this “avoidance” along with other maladaptive emotional regulation strategies, is part of a modern neoliberalist epidemic, contributing to mental health issues, especially anxiety (Salters-Pedneault, Tull, & Roemer, 2004), relationship breakdown, and even poor physical health outcomes, including lifestyle diseases such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. This is suggestive of an

overvaluing of individualism, driven by capitalist values, which has evolved into social narcissism, whereby the individual need for comfort and “happiness” trumps everything.

Individualism: A Global Health Crisis

According to Romanian Sociologist Professor Dan Ioan Dascalu (2014), the globalization of mass communication has led to a widespread increase in the values of individualism. Although globalization and individualism on the surface appear contradictory, Dascalu argues that globalization in contemporary society is based on the values of capitalism and democracy, both of which have an individualist ideology at their foundation. While globalization is perpetuated by mass media, and in particular by social media, the prioritization of individualistic values in neoliberal society has become the norm. The associated avoidance of discomfort is therefore framed by a broader social and political discourse, which is perhaps in part a response to the economic prosperity and indulgence of the 30 years after World War II—a time where emotional, financial, and physical suffering was abundant.

In symmetry with Dascalu’s research, Frank (2013) suggests that the idea of conquering physical and emotional unease constitutes the culturally preferred narrative. He states that the restitution story of returning the sick person to the socially acceptable status quo has been woven through our social and cultural fabric since the biomedical revolution. Perhaps our persistent quest for health and wellness is a representation of our repressed fears regarding mortality and the fragility of our human existence. Is it, perhaps, this existential crisis which is highly individual that feeds the broader social and political discourse? Either way, the net result is that many of us have become disembodied, and have splintered off that very part of ourselves that ironically *connects* us with our mortality, giving us meaning and purpose. In other words, we have softened and moved away from who we once were.

Running and Neoliberalism

Sociologist Kristin Owen Westfall states that “running gives us many experiences besides being tired, with a special intensity that is unusual among the comforts of modern life” (Westfall, 2012, p. 5). She states that running is more than just a pastime, but it is a reflection and representation of our society. In investigating how the environment has influenced the way running is participated in and perceived, she suggests that heightened periods of running coincide with the rise in neoliberalism in the 1970s and the rise of the capitalist class. Neoliberalist ideals can be seen in the power structures established through running and sports, and coincide with the “ideal” capitalist worker who is okay with inequalities, and believes individual competition is natural (Westfall, 2012).

Westfall's (2012) research is also somewhat supported by statistics which demonstrate that ultra-running has experienced exponential growth over the past decade with much of this ascribed to athletes from Japan, Italy, Poland, and the USA. Interestingly, master athletes account for the greatest increase (>40 years of age). One study by Hoffman and Foggart (2012) analyzed the demographic characteristics of 161-km ultra-running events and found that participants were mostly middle-aged (>45 years) married men, who were highly educated. They concluded that athletes with a higher income were more likely to attend an ultra, than athletes from economically underdeveloped nations, for example, Africa (Foggart & Hoffman, 2012). In other words, ultra-running appears to be experiencing considerable growth among populations who best fit the capital class.

Ultra-Running: Political Resistance and Social Healing

However, is ultra-running a *reflection* of, or *resistance* to, capitalist values? While certain power structures established through *competitive* running and sport may reflect capitalist ideology, cultural historian Martha Verbrugge (1988) has a very different view about what running represents in society. She suggests that running is a reaction to social dys-ease—an uneasiness or anxiety about social change. She adds that the 1960s counterculture that embodied a rebellion against middle-class values led to the prioritization of inner life and personal experience over politics. In this sense, running is interpreted as a personal experience, and a rebellion against capitalist power structures. According to Lasch (1978), it is this turn “inward” that has led to a narcissistic preoccupation with the self.

Perhaps 40 years of this preoccupation with the self has led to a realization and a search for meaning and purpose that extends beyond our narcissistic and shallow self. It could be argued that we are at the forefront of a *new* wave of globalization, a shared realization that we need to reconnect with who we once were in order to heal both as a society and as individuals.

In his book, *Born to Run*, McDougall suggests that “when things look worst, we run” (McDougall, 2010). He refers to three occasions in American history where running experienced a boom in popularity. The first being the Great Depression, the second during the recovery periods after the Vietnam War and the Cold War in the 1970s, and the third being 1 year after the September 11 terror attacks. It was during this latter “crisis” that trail running became the fastest growing outdoor sport in the USA (McDougall, 2010). This aligns well with Verbrugge's views on running as a response to social dys-ease. Both McDougall and Verbrugge seem to agree that running is perhaps one way in which people seek individual healing from social “injury” or dys-ease.

Running as Embodied Healing

The production of healing beyond scientifically measured health is in danger of being forgotten and ignored (Sointu, 2006). Theories of embodiment can provide a way to analyze how experiences of healing are created through complex connections between social ideals, constructions of the body, and the performance of embodied health practices (Sointu, 2006). Although Sointu (2006) refers primarily to alternative health practices, her research could certainly be applied outside the clinic, to activities like running. Embodied running, as opposed to competitive performance-based running, in particular challenges social and cultural discourse by focusing on *reconnection*, both between mind and body and to who we once were. In other words, it makes us whole, forcing us to confront our own embodiment.

In addition to representing a form of political resistance, and a *healing* response to social dys-ease and uneasiness, running in particular is a demonstration of what Merleau-Ponty describes as a pre-reflective habitual activity where a kind of “body knowledge” is recruited (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Runners experience the world through their body. Running itself represents a body-focused activity that is freely available to anyone, and not at all constrained by the walls of a health professional’s office or clinic. As a body-led experience, it also represents an *interconnection* between mind and body, erasing the culturally defined line between the two so often seen in biomedicine. It is suggested that interconnectedness, in this case achieved via running, provides a vehicle for healing through self-reflection (Sointu, 2006). It also provides an antidote to the disembodiment and disconnection between mind and body that has existed since the biomedical revolution, perpetuated through capitalism and neoliberalism.

Ultra-running is an extreme form of running. Its rise in popularity is occurring during a time of political and social extremes. Terrorist and anti-terrorist discourse, the globalization of war, political instability, the global refugee crisis, constant threats to our cybersecurity, and global financial crisis and poverty are just a few of the broader current social and political discourses of our time. Perhaps in a climate of social and political “extremes,” healing takes on a different meaning, requiring extreme methods such as ultra-running.

Not coincidentally, this rise in social dys-ease exists alongside an increase in lifestyle diseases and mental health issues suggestive of an interconnectedness between social forces and individual well-being. We are suffering both individually and socially. So while running, and in particular ultra-running, can be considered one form of social healing, can it also provide individual healing? The rising popularity of alternative and complementary medicine has been suggested to be due to the emergence of a “proactive” and “empowered” client who no longer wants to be treated like a biomedical patient and instead desires to be treated as a “whole person” (Sointu, 2006). Perhaps we are seeking healing through embodiment? If so, ultra-running is a vehicle through which this can be achieved.

There is a broad consensus that regular exercise reduces the risk of lifestyle diseases such as heart disease, obesity, and type II diabetes. In addition, research consistently demonstrates the mood-

enhancing effects of regular exercise (see Bernstein & McNally, 2017; Biddle, 2001; Thayer, 1994), and enhanced cognitive control (Giles et al., 2018). However, the exact mechanisms through which running promotes emotional healing is less clear. In her qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with five female runners who reported that they had used distance running as a mechanism to help them cope during a time of emotional stress, Leedy (2009) identified themes around empowerment and sustained well-being as well as running as an active coping strategy to improve mood and reduce stress. Although running does not *prevent* uncomfortable and distressing emotional experiences, it does appear that for some, it helps them “recover” (Bernstein & McNally, 2017), which suggests that running may promote healthy emotion regulation, perhaps by allowing runners to sit with their emotions, grounding them in their body providing embodied healing.

Embodiment refers to human action and interaction with the world, which is guided by the body. An ultra- runner is for the most part not consciously directing their legs and arms to move. Their actions exist on a pre-reflective level. They are habituated actions, guided by the body. This pre-reflective dimension is an experience that is bodily anchored and difficult to grasp in a scientific sense (Stelter, 2000). Emotive and cognitive processes have their roots in the body because they are interlinked and exist to guide action itself (Fuchs & Schlimme, 2009). This suggests that the emotional healing that may take place for many runners is *body led*.

The Injured Runner

The self we think we are is a gestalt of foreground realizations and background possibilities. Illness and injury shifts the gestalt. (Frank, 2013)

Ultra-runners may seek emotional and social healing through running. However, running as a body-led activity relies on the able-bodiedness of the runner. This can be problematic, given the fact that injury is common in the world of ultra-running (Hoffman and Krishnan 2014). The demands of their sport arguably place ultra-runners at a greater risk for developing exercise-based problems and injuries. In one of the largest studies of ultra-runners, over half (77%) were found to have experienced a running-related injury in the past year that interfered with training (Hoffman, 2014).

When a runner experiences an injury, they feel sensory pain and their experience of their body is shifted. Pain exerts a “centrifugal” force by gathering space and time inward to the center – the here and now body (Leder, 1990). The runner’s attention moves from their world and surroundings to their body and a specific part of their body. This dramatic attentional shift alters not only their relationship with themselves, especially their body, but also their relationships with others. While pleasure tends to maintain our intentional links with other people, pain disrupts them and instead induces self-reflection

and isolation (Leder, 1990). This can negatively impact the runner's connection with their support system, and ultra-running subculture, leading to further isolation.

Injury strikes at the very heart of "I am" because it is a disruption of the lived body, and the lived body is not extrinsic to the self. As such, a threat to the body incorporates a threat to the very sense of self (Toombs, 1988). *Otherness* is the phrase used to describe a foreignness that permeates life when a lived body takes on alien qualities – in this case, an injury (Heidegger, 1996). However, according to Svenaeus (2015), this concept of otherness or alienness needs to be interpreted in relation to the *whole world* of injury or illness as opposed to just the lived body (Svenaeus, 2000, 2011). An injury therefore cannot only cause the body to feel alien, but in certain circumstances leads to the whole world feeling alien. For a runner, the world they live in and how they experience it is altered when they are injured. Potentially, they no longer fit into the running subculture that provides them with their interactive identity.

Not only is the world of the runner disrupted at the time of injury, for runners who recall past injuries, they are remembered with such arresting lucidity because it is not being experienced as the past; the injury experienced that are being told are unassimilated fragments that refuse to become past, haunting the present and future (Frank, 2013). This is especially the case when the injury continues to impact running. Perhaps the runner's body has indefinitely altered, and as such, so has their experience of their world.

One strategy athletes use to make sense of pain resulting from injury is depersonalization (Young, 1995). They become disembodied as they talk about their bodies as being distanced from themselves, emphasizing that it is the body not the self that has given out (Young, 1995). By submitting to a disembodied and dualistic notion of injury, the athlete can preserve their fractured running identity, which is aligned with the broader cultural discourse relating to competition-based running and ultra-running; stoicism, endurance, normalization of pain, and discomfort (Collinson and Hockey, 2007). As a result, when injured, the embodied ultra-runner is at risk of returning to a state of *disembodiment*, perpetuated by an overreliance on biomedicine, and the "narrative surrender" (Frank, 2013) that occurs when the health professional's narrative becomes dominant.

Narrative "surrender" represents a *crisis of control*. This apparent struggle or crisis brought about by injury is exacerbated by the wider discourse around "health," as conceptions of "health" are grounded in biomedical definitions that focus on the absence of disease or physical malfunction (Crawford, 1993); as such, the injured person is always the "other" to a society that defines health as its norm (Frank, 2013). In this sense, the injured runner's experience of their body as unfamiliar and alien is perpetuated in this discourse, causing them to seek expert advice in the hope of returning to running as soon as possible. Of course, this also reignites existential anxieties around mortality, driven by an awareness of the body as fallible, which results in further help seeking and bodily avoidance.

Having said that, an embodied definition of “health” suggests that health is an experience that enables or limits the capacity of individuals to meet the challenges and demands they face in specific social circumstances (Theberge, 2008). Here, capacity refers to a broader context; however, for injured runners, the primary frame of reference in which they consider their capacity is their running. However, what does capacity really refer to in the context of running? Does it refer to a return to pre-injury running capacity? What about the runner who can continue to run with a reduced capacity to meet pre-injury expectations? Perhaps their injury has resulted in physical limitations, or perhaps having extended time away from training means that they are required to build strength and endurance to return to their former running ability. Either way, returning from injury is progressive and capacity is relative to this progression, and to the subjective experiences of the runner. “Health” in this context refers to a return to pre-injury functioning. However, this experience is entirely subjective and is based on a combination of external and internal factors: external measures of performance as well as internal indicators triggered by discomfort, pain, or simply an inability to perform at pre-injury level.

Injury as Resistance

For some runners, an injury can be career ending, triggering a life-altering adjustment process. Identity is best described as a constructed interaction between the lived body and the experiencing world. Sparkes (1988) refers to identity as a *reflexive project of the self*. He suggests that identity is not unified around a coherent self, rather it is formed and transformed continuously. This suggests an alternative to the somewhat static and singular reference to “identity,” in favor of a fluid concept representing several identities continuously responding to social and cultural influences. This is good news for the ultra-runner who can no longer run, it that their running identity has the potential to move with fluidity in response to *their* changing world. However, this internal process involves challenging and even *resisting* the comparatively *less* fluid cultural discourse that may require considerable internal resources and support.

The ultra-runner’s relationship with their body, and with it the meaning they ascribe to their running, shifts at the time of injury by bringing it back into awareness in an unfamiliar way. Of interest is how this develops over time, both through the injury process and afterwards, especially when running recommences. Does the body return to the background and dys-appear as Leder (1990) suggests? Or does it remain in the foreground, with the disembodied runner constantly scanning for signs of discomfort out of a fear of reinjury? Perhaps this is dependent on how the runner chooses to respond/react to the injury, as well as the nature and extent of the injury itself. However, while a culture of *risk* frames the way clinicians and athletes negotiate treatment, Safai concludes that a culture of *precaution* frames the ways individuals view their health and well-being (Safai, 2003), which is perpetuated by medical professionals tasked with directing the athlete back to sport. This suggests that

the biomedical model contributes to a culture of risk in two ways. The first, by perpetuating a disembodied view of injury (the body as a machine), leading to an overreliance on the medical profession, and secondly, by perpetuating a sense of “otherness” and encouraging risk-taking by facilitating a return to able-bodiedness and “wellness,” and sport/running. This forms the biomedical focus on recovery, where the body becomes objectified (Toombs, 1988).

It has been suggested that athletes often talk about their bodies as being distanced from themselves, experiencing a heightened sense of body awareness because they are hypersensitive to injury (Young, 1995). This is especially the case for runners who have experienced injury in the past. Through depersonalization (Young, 1995), the injured runner emphasizes that it is *the body* and not the self that has given out. Preserving running identity is a significant motivator for injured runners. Brock and Kleiber (1994) in their work with respect to athletes with career-ending injuries suggested that it is important for the athlete to be able to show, with the help of a narrative about the injury, that the injury was caused by sport. In that way, it is possible for the athlete to maintain their athletic identity and their relationships with significant others in their sporting world. This process is made easier with medical dualistic approaches to injury treatment, which objectifies the body. However, what are the implications of this strategy on reinjury? It could be suggested that depersonalization leads to further body alienation and “other-ness,” and an overreliance on others, especially medical professionals and coaches. This may cause the injured runner to *suffer* with their injury, and the language of suffering is the language of loss (Charmaz, 1995). As such, these runners are more likely to experience suffering, as they remain in a restitution narrative (Frank, 2013) focused on restoring their injured body and the loss of their former able-bodied self.

Embodied Healing

Having said that, an injury presents a unique opportunity to resist traditional discourse. While biomedical approaches to healing rely on dualistic notions of the mind and body as separate with the health professional as an “expert,” an embodied approach to healing involves the ultra-runner reclaiming their narrative, and reconnecting with their body and lived experience. It also provides an elegant reframe of the *meaning* of running, moving away from a performance discourse to a more embodied one; running for the love of running, rather than striving for a performance-related goal. The injury response therefore involves a corporeal intuition, or a body-led *knowing*, whereby decisions are not consciously made by the injured runner, rather the body leads the healing process. Embodied healing involves the runner learning to reclaim their narrative, and confront their own embodiment, while at the same time creating space for the medical narrative to *inform* their experience as opposed to reconstructing and “claiming” it. According to Annandale, health and illness are not polar opposites, as

someone can be “healthy” but still refer to functional limitations (Annandale, 2014). A runner with an injury therefore does not necessarily represent “other.”

A runner who confronts their own embodiment through injury draws on their own internal resources to re-story their injury, taking into account the social and cultural discourses that frame their experience, and perhaps even shifting the lens to a more adaptive and fluid discourse, in support of their *reflexive identity* process. While sports medicine practitioners should remain an important component of injury “recovery,” adopting a more social model of care, involving the individual in the process and acknowledging what it is like to be injured, could well reduce the sense of vulnerability of self and the risk-taking behavior related to guilt and other emotional responses (Charmaz, 1995).

With the injured runner adopting a much more active role in their health care, and having their narrative validated by the health practitioners involved in their care, a much broader treatment and/or rehabilitation program can be developed. The athlete can explore approaches that facilitate embodiment, as opposed to surrendering their narrative to “experts” who perpetuate the mind–body disconnect. Methods such as acupuncture, yoga, light therapy, and cryotherapy, while not considered “evidence based” from a medical perspective, may in fact help some injured runners to reconnect with their body. By increasing the available resources and drawing on multiple methods of mind/body healing, the injured runner may be able to shift their narrative, and *adapt* to their body as opposed to engaging in a “battle,” a fight to restore the body to its former functioning.

Liminality (Gennep, 1960) refers to the ambiguous and uncertain (identity) state between a previous status and a new status yet to be defined (Collinson, 2005). Perhaps this is the place that many injured runners need to sit and accept. With an able body that was perhaps once considered infallible, their “new” body may need some getting used to. Its unfamiliarity and perceived flaws or weaknesses somehow need to be reintegrated and internalized. This luminous state provides an opportunity to reflect on the broader discourses that frame the injury experience, encouraging a resistance to neoliberal discourse with a focus on biomedical approaches to healing – to a more embodied process. Perhaps in time, as this individual resistance grows, a new discourse will evolve, creating a more collaborative and integrative healing process, which is led by and centered around individual narrative and embodied experience.

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