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Running:  
Anatomy of a Middle-class Obsession

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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## **Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Neither the content nor the results have been published elsewhere.

## Abstract

This thesis explores recreational running as a social practice using the tools of Bourdeusian field analysis. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, it maps and describes the social terrain of running, and explores the ways in which forms of running – and running *per se* – can be understood as symbolically potent performances of social position. The research methods include a large-scale survey of runners (n=2,637) and a series of in-depth interviews with runners (n=21). Running is also placed in its broader context as one of a wide range of forms of active leisure through a secondary analysis of data collected by Sport England. This study deploys Bourdieusian tools in a new way, using them to explode the ostensibly monolithic category of ‘running’ into its constituent parts, revealing a cosmos of socially distinctive (and even antagonistic) forms of running within it - a field of positions associated with distinctive cultural meanings and values. In mapping and analysing social and cultural differences *within* running, this study paints a new, more nuanced and complete picture of running culture as a dynamic, uneven and contested space through which social inequalities are reinforced and even justified. Key findings centre on the roles of class and gender in shaping running engagement through the mediation of access to capital and variations in habitus relating to tastes around the ‘healthy lifestyle’, body-shape and fitness ideals, ‘authenticity’ seeking, perceptions of competence, competition and ‘mental toughness’.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## The starting line

### 1.1 In defence of running

Whenever I get asked about the subject of my PhD, I have to suppress the urge to launch into a sort of paranoid defence of the sociological relevance and intellectual seriousness of my research topic. Running (like sport as a whole) seems to lack the gravitas of heavyweight sociological themes like class, racism, power or inequality. I hear myself excusing the subject matter as an ‘interesting prism’ through which to examine wider, deeper social issues, or else gloss over the subject matter altogether in favour of explaining more esoteric aspects of the research design or data analysis. No doubt this has a lot to do with my own insecurities, but my reticence needs to be understood in the context of lingering academic prejudices surrounding the study of sport in sociology (see Carrington, 2010).

The seeds of this chauvinism were sown early in our discipline’s history, when classical sociologists worked hard to demarcate their own distinct zone of expertise in contrast to more established sciences (see Carter and Charles, 2010). Part of this process was to prise apart the study of ‘social’ and ‘natural’ realms, leaving nature – including the human body - to the biologists and establishing sociology’s authority over a social world hacked off at its biological roots. This division, underpinned by Descartes’ ontological dichotomy of mind and body (Tulle, 2015), shaped the development of sociology for many decades, with the result that body-centric topics like sport were largely neglected. And even today, following the ‘somatic turn’ in sociology (Turner, 1984), sport as a research topic retains a slightly frivolous image. According to Carrington (2010: 6) ‘sport both hyper-accentuates and finds itself on the wrong side of a supposedly insurmountable (and deeply 'classed') dualism between useless physicality and purposeful intellectualism’. As a result, according to Bourdieu (1990: 156) ‘there are, on the one hand, those who know sport very well on a physical level but do

not know how to talk about it and, on the other hand, those who know sport very poorly on a practical level and who could talk about it, but disdain doing so, or do so without rhyme or reason'.

The sociology of sport's awkward academic position is neatly embodied in the person of Loïc Wacquant, who, despite having authored a highly respected study of boxing in Chicago (Wacquant, 2004), remained at pains to deny that his subject was the sport itself, but rather 'the twofold incorporation of social structures: the collective creation of proficient bodies and the ingenuous unfolding of the socially constituted powers they harbor' (Wacquant, 2005: 444). Elsewhere he described sport as 'a lowly object in social life' (Early, Solomon and Wacquant, 1996: 23) and said that following the success of his boxing study, his association with Pierre Bourdieu had saved him from 'disappearing into the oblivion of the sociology of sport' (24). Given prevailing prejudices, I can empathise with Wacquant's resistance to attempts to 'ghettoise' his work, and sympathise with the idea that sport can be studied as a manifestation of universal social processes rather than simply in and of itself. However, I would also argue that sport, and running in particular, *are* important social phenomena, and that they *do* deserve study in their own right. For sociology to neglect or downgrade sport, a category of social action as ubiquitous to and specifically shaped by our times as any other seems to me a failure of sociological objectivity and a kind of wilful myopia. If as sociologists we aim to discern the deep bone structure beneath the surface features of society's fleshy face it is vital that we subject all of its aspects to serious sociological scrutiny, not just those we *a priori* deem worthy of attention. After all, would a survey of the culture of the Roman Empire be complete without reference to the amphitheatre and hippodrome? Or of classical Greece without mention of the gymnasium or Olympic Games?

Perhaps sport is doubly cursed as a sociological topic; not only is it an intrinsically embodied activity, it is also a form of *leisure*. Leisure time, commonly understood, is what is left over once the serious business of discharging responsibilities at work and in the home is complete. It is for relaxing (i.e. recharging in order to return to the fray), or for participating in frivolous hobbies and pastimes whose role is simply to consume time – a necessity because,

according to Svendsen (2005: 23), 'we cannot face tackling time that is "empty"'. Leisure activities then, can be seen as little more than 'filler', plugging the gaps and providing a rest between bouts of engagement in serious, attention-worthy work and responsibility. Even some of the most respected sociologists who have written extensively about sport and leisure have perpetuated this 'sideshow' perspective. Elias and Dunning (1986), drawing on Freudian psychology, conceptualised sport as an outlet for 'uncivilized' pre-social drives. Playing sport, they explained, was a way of lancing a boil that could otherwise infect the body politic and interfere with the smooth running of modern, rational society. And Veblen (2007) saw leisure as an arena for essentially decorative and wasteful status competition rather than for any kind of significant fulfilment.

And yet, other voices have argued for a quite different understanding of the centrality and meaning of leisure time activities. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle (2013: 224) asserted that 'the first principle of all action is leisure. Both [leisure and work] are required, but leisure is better than occupation and is its end'. Johan Huizinga's (2016) *Homo Ludens*, written in 1938, argued that the roots of all human culture lie in play. The German philosopher, Josef Pieper, called leisure 'the basis of culture', and 'the preserve of freedom, of education and culture, and of that undiminished humanity which views the world as a whole' (Pieper, 1963: 46). And some Marxists have used similar arguments, contrasting the freedom and authenticity available through leisure with the alienation and degradation of factory work (see Bambery, 1996). These perspectives, in which leisure is associated with all that is best and meaningful in human existence, suggest that access to leisure - and the decisions we make about how we use it - are vital to human flourishing and to pursuing the good life. Thus understood, for sociologists, leisure presents an unparalleled window on the subjectivities – the fundamental values, needs, identities and aspirations - of its participants, and hence on the characteristics of the wider culture of which they are part.

Needless to say, it is with the ideas propounded by these 'pro-leisure' scholars that I align myself. And despite my misgivings about others' prejudices regarding the worthwhileness of spending five years of my life studying running, I hope,

over the course of this thesis, to demonstrate that it is not only an important and significant social phenomenon deserving of sociological attention in itself, but also a fascinating window on some of the wider cultural concerns that define our age.

## **1.2 Origins and rationale**

So much for justifying my research subject, but what brought me to running as a topic in the first place? I chose running in part because of my involvement in the sport (on-and-off) since childhood. I was a good schoolboy middle-distance runner, and ever since then being a runner has always been a valued part of my identity. After a hiatus during my 20s when my running was limited to the treadmill at the gym, I returning to competition around the age of 30, just over a decade ago. Today I run several times per week, but only race two or three times each year. The competitive element of running has become less important recently, but running retains an important place in my life. Long years of training and racing, sometimes as a member of a club, sometimes with informal groups and sometimes alone, enabled me to start my research with a good deal of practitioner-knowledge and cultural familiarity. Furthermore, my time in running, and particularly as a member of my local running club in Cambridge, equipped me with a wide network of contacts that I was able to draw on in the data collection phase, particularly with survey respondent and interviewee recruitment. As well as participating in running itself, I had also read widely in the large popular literature around running prior to embarking on my research, giving me a head-start in building knowledge of the sport's cultures beyond my direct experiences.

As well as these practical and biographical considerations, I was also drawn to studying running because of my appreciation of just how significant the sport has become as a social phenomenon in recent years. The latest data from Sport England's Active People Survey (Active People Interactive website, 2018) suggests running is the second most popular participation sport in England after swimming, with almost 5% of the adult population running at least once per week. This figure – equating to around 2.5 million people if extrapolated to the UK population as a whole - has grown from a base of a few thousand in the early

1970s, with a particularly large increase since the turn of the millennium (see Borgers, Vos and Scheerder, 2015), and is echoed in participation studies from across the Western world. What this seems to suggest is that running addresses the needs and tastes associated with 21<sup>st</sup> century Western culture in particular.

### **1.3 Defining running and identifying research questions**

So, what sort of a social practice is running? Ostensibly it would seem to fall – as I have suggested - within the ambit of leisure activities, broadly defined as un-coerced activity engaged in during free time that is either satisfying or fulfilling (see Stebbins, 2012). More specifically, it could also be described as a sport. But both of these definitions feel partial and inadequate. Certainly, running can be a competitive sport with races, medals and championships; but is a gentle jog with a friend on a Sunday morning or a session on the treadmill really a sport, or something else? For some, running might be better understood as a part of a project for healthy living, a beauty practice, a weight loss tool, a social activity, a way to experience the outdoors or the limits of human endurance, for others, it could be best understood as a charity fund raising tool. Running then, is not simply a sport, and it is also possible to contest the extent to which it fits the standard definition of a leisure activity as one that is ‘un-coerced’. Those overweight patients who are denied potentially lifesaving NHS treatments until they lose weight could argue - with some justification - that they have been forced to take up running on pain of death. And in other, subtler ways, the motivation to run can be connected to social pressures that act to restrict deviation from particular norms or ideals, for instance relating to factors like gender or age (see Tulle, 2008).

It is this ambiguity and flexibility around running – the way it appears to be able to fulfil many different needs for very different groups of people - that is the central theme of this research. So, in thinking about what running means and what cultural work it does, it was clear I would have to account for and describe different ways of doing running in terms of both motivations and practices, and how this variation enables the performance of quite different forms of identity. I would also need to explore the extent to which different ways of doing running emerge from and reflect the needs, tastes, identities and experiences of groups

rooted in different social positions, as well as from more widely shared culture.

As such, the research questions that emerged were:

1. To what extent can recreational running be understood as a set of distinctive sub-practices?
2. How does social position influence the ways people engage in running?
3. Through what processes are social characteristics connected to people's choices about how they engage with running?
4. How do different ways of doing running contribute to the reproduction of different social identities?

#### **1.4 Thesis structure**

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two is the main part of my literature review, and focuses on the important theories and ideas that I draw on during this research, as well as looking at existing literature on running and sport more generally. It draws particular attention to the work of Giddens and Foucault, and provides a detailed account of the sociology of Bourdieu, which is central to this thesis. I also discuss a wide range of other theoretical and empirical works bearing on the study of leisure, sport and lifestyle, helping to situate my thesis in the context of existing research.

Chapter three is my methodological chapter. Here I describe my research design, the development of my instruments and the research process in detail. I discuss the challenges of using qualitative and quantitative methods separately and in terms of their integration in a mixed-strategy design. I also outline some of the issues I faced during data collection, and highlight key ethical issues and lessons learned throughout the process.

In line with Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992: 90) assertion that, 'we cannot grasp [field] structure without a historical, that is, genetic analysis of its constitution and of the tensions that exist between positions in it', chapter four presents a historical analysis of the development of running in Britain. Here I apply Bourdieu's thinking tools of field, habitus and capital to the development of running, showing how gender, class and ethnic inequalities have shaped the sport over centuries. I also draw on Elias's 'civilising process' and the work of



Foucault and others around 'healthism' to help frame this history. This chapter also represents a continuation of the literature review, incorporating and discussing a wide range of writing on running, sport, the body and selfhood.

In chapter five I turn to my findings. Here the focus is on making sense of the quantitative data, including both a secondary analysis of data from Sport England's Active People Survey, and an analysis of key features of the primary data from my own survey. This chapter provides the big picture, in terms of both situating running in social space relative to other forms of active leisure, and exploring the variety *within* running, which is described both in practical and social terms. The map of practices within running that this chapter presents provides the key quantitative evidence for the structuring of the sport by gender, age and class that is further explored in subsequent chapters.

Chapter six uses my qualitative and quantitative data to explore the first substantive theme of my research: Running and the disciplined self. I describe how running can be understood in the context of the 'healthy lifestyle', with its important ethical, aesthetic, classed and gendered dimensions. I also describe the close relationship between running and the pursuit of particular body ideals, and how this too is shaped by gender, class and ethical factors. In this chapter, Foucault's ideas around self-discipline loom large, and help me to draw links between the popularity of running today and the rise of neoliberalism in the West over the last forty years or so.

The focus of chapter seven is on running as a competitive sport. I examine the ways gender and class interact to shape competitive engagement, and how male and female runners tend to follow different trajectories through the sport. The demands placed on runners' wider lives and relationships by their commitment to running are also explored, with special reference to the role of control - over time, people and resources - in shaping the ability to compete successfully. This chapter also considers the nature of the symbolic capital attached to successful competitive performances in running.

The eighth chapter addresses the role of place in shaping the meaning and social structure of running. Taking each of four environments in turn (road, running

track, countryside and obstacle course), I describe the ways these are connected to different values and meanings, with their physical and cultural features influencing the meaning and status of running within them. I also consider how different running places present different sets of symbolic and practical barriers that help reinforce inequalities in participation rates, and hence, how the performance of running in different environments is rendered a powerful marker of social distinction.

Finally, chapter nine presents my conclusions. Organised into four overarching themes, I draw together key insights from my findings chapters to demonstrate how I have answered my research questions and provided a novel contribution to knowledge. The themes discussed centre on the use of Bourdieu's field analysis tools to dissect a social practice; the role of physical capital in facilitating distinction in running; the relationship between running and middle-classness; and the role of gender in mediating engagement in the sport. I end the chapter with some final thoughts on the research process and my personal experiences of studying running over the last four years.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

# On the meaning of bodies in motion

### 2.1 Perspectives on running

How should I conceptualise running as an object of sociological study? Which theories and literatures should I draw on to contextualise and inform my work? When I embarked on this research, I quickly realised that those researchers who had gone before me had trodden a number of different paths through the sociological terrain, each of which, should I choose it, would result in a very different thesis. Following the path of phenomenology, for instance, would generate rich, personal accounts of running as an embodied, sensory experience (e.g. Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2011), whereas the trails laid down by proponents of the 'edgework' tradition could lead to a thesis that focused on the extreme physical and mental challenges experienced by runners, and how the appeal of these 'liminal experiences' was linked to the stultifying effects of our otherwise comfortable modern lives (see Lyng, 2005). Other sociologists, including a Spanish PhD student I spoke to, struck out on a different path, in his case using Practice Theory (see Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012) to describe running as a practice constructed of interlocking and pre-existing elements of meaning, infrastructure and competence. A steady trickle of researchers have taken a more demographic route, concentrating on counting and categorising runners according to social or motivational characteristics (e.g. Breedveld, 2015). And other fellow travellers have pursued running along the wider, busier roads marked out by the serious leisure perspective (e.g. Pišot, 2015), studies of neoliberal 'responsibilization' and 'healthism' (e.g. Mayes, 2016), and of the (re)production of classed and gendered body ideals (e.g. Abbas, 2004).

Clearly running, like any other social phenomenon, can be studied in a range of distinctive ways that shine useful light on different aspects of its experience, meaning or social characteristics, and I will draw on insights from the traditions mentioned above in the research that follows. However, my specific research interests dictated that the central theoretical approach I chose would need to be

capable of supporting conclusions about both broad participation patterns *and* how these were linked to the role and meaning of running in individuals' lives. For this reason, I chose to ground my account of running in the language and thinking tools of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (see Bourdieu, 2005), which (as described in detail below) provides a powerful account of the relationship between the personal and the social, and deploys precisely the kind of mixed-method research I would need to conduct my study. However, whilst Bourdieu's work is central to my theoretical and methodological approach, other writers have had more useful things to say about the historical development of the culture in which running has become so popular. For this I draw on the work of Foucault around governmentality and biopower, Elias on the 'civilizing process', and more contextually, on Giddens' ideas about the salience of the body in contemporary society.

The focus of this literature review will be on outlining the key ideas of these thinkers, showing how they have been applied to the study of sport and active leisure by other researchers, and explaining their particular relevance to my research. After this, I will provide a survey of existing empirical research on running across a range of sociological traditions, situating the present study and defining its unique contribution. The exception to this structure will be my discussion of Elias, whose work I will examine and deploy as part of the historical analysis in chapter four. Indeed, in a sense my review of the literature is split across these two chapters, interposed by that describing my research methods.

## **2.2 Giddens and the salience of the body in late modernity**

Commentators including Howson (2013) and Shilling (2012), have pointed to an increasing body-consciousness in modern Western society. People, they argue, have never been more compelled to reflect on their status as embodied entities. This has been connected to a number of factors, including: The promotion of biomedical research in ways that position bodily health and longevity as something we can control as individuals, particularly with regards our choices around lifestyle (see Mayes, 2016); an increased valorisation and visibility of youth and youth culture, which promotes youthful bodily ideals and encourages an increased 'fear and apprehension about ageing' (see Howson, 2013: 191),

especially the *appearance* of ageing (see Fairhurst, 1998); and – particularly since the advent of the internet technologies as a way to access pornography – increasing exposure to images of highly sexualised, highly managed idealisations of both female and male bodies (see McKeown, Parry and Tracy, 2018; Morrison et al. 2006).

Of course, people have been subject to norms and expectations about bodily appearance and behaviour for centuries (see Elias, 2000). The bodies of middle-class women in particular have been strictly policed and managed through regimes of dieting and painful body shaping technologies throughout the modern period (see Vester, 2010; Fangman et al. 2004, Hyde, 2000, Mahe, 2013). Through the school system the young too, have been subject to institutional regimes targeting bodily development for well over a hundred years (see chapter four). But today men as well as women of all classes and a wide range of ages are increasingly held to widely circulated and highly visible bodily norms that, according to commentators such as those mentioned above, have contributed to a more body-conscious culture than anything seen in the recent past.

Sociological thinking too, has been influenced by the increasing centrality of the body in Western culture, with work drawing on the ideas of respected sociologists such as Goffman, Foucault and Bourdieu influential in the emergence of 'embodiment' as an important research theme in the 1980s (Turner, 2008; Howson, 2013). As discussed above, sociology's 'somatic turn' took place after a long period in which bodies were largely neglected by the discipline. This is not to say that they were completely ignored by sociologists, but rather that they were an 'absent presence' (Shilling, 2012) or 'ghost' (Howson, 2013), tacitly acknowledged, but rarely 'focused on directly... [and were regarded as] outside the legitimate social concerns of the discipline' (Shilling, 2012: 21).

One of the scholars who has addressed the issue of embodiment in sociology, particularly in relation to identity, is Anthony Giddens. According to Giddens (1991) 'late modernity' is a time of great 'ontological insecurity', with older social, political and religious traditions no longer providing a taken for granted basis for our identities. Set adrift from old certainties, he has argued, individuals

are now compelled to engage in 'reflexive projects of the self', curating a coherent narrative of identity drawing on the smorgasbord of practices, products and beliefs offered by modern culture. Bodies, understood as the outward manifestation of our inner selves, play a central role in enabling these reflexively constructed identities to be asserted. As such, 'body projects' – work specifically aimed at imbuing the body with meanings or forms of value - have become, according to Giddens, a significant feature of late modern life (Shilling, 2012; Giddens, 1991).

Body projects can take many forms, and include those focused primarily on aesthetic ends, such as dieting or collecting tattoos and body piercings (see, for example, Kosut, 2000; Orend and Gangne, 2009), as well as those focused on improving health, fitness or achieving or maintaining certain physical capacities (see, for example, Throsby, 2016; Tulle, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Many body projects, such as jogging, going to the gym and regimes of healthy eating, often appear to combine both types of motivation. So, given this wide variety of potential body projects, how do individuals decide which to commit their time and resources to? For Giddens, modern people, freed from the traditional frameworks that once informed and constrained their narratives of identity, can now exercise a 'freedom of action' (Giddens, 2002: 47) and 'control [over their]... life circumstances' (Giddens, 1991: 202) to select the particular body project that best sustains their reflexively determined identity.

Giddens' *a la carte* model of identity projects has been criticised for failing properly to account for the structuring effects of social position on the types of identity narratives and associated lifestyles individuals 'choose' (see Atkinson, 2007). And indeed, empirical studies consistently show that the types of body project people engage in are heavily influenced by factors such as gender, age, ethnicity and class, both independently and intersectionally (see, for example, Gill et al. (2005) and Ong (2005) on gendered body projects; Hurd, Clark and Griffin, (2007) on age and body projects; and Bourdieu (2010) on the role of class). Such studies share Giddens' understanding of body projects as a means through which identity is expressed, but rather than focusing on personal,

reflexive dimension of identity, many emphasise body projects' role in marking *group* identity and in actualising socially conditioned tastes and values.

One key finding from these studies has been the important role of gender in structuring the forms of body project people engage in. Whilst women have traditionally engaged in practices designed to constrain, restrain and *manage* the body, men have been engaged in more active, competitively focused sporting pursuits. And, as mentioned above, women – particularly those from more privileged groups – have engaged in long-term, rigorous regimes of body management since well before the 'late modern' period. Victorian women, for example, were encouraged to attain wasp waists as small as corsets could make them (Mahe, 2013), with some girls brought up wearing them to permanently deform their rib cages (see Fleming, 2013). By the 1920s corsets were outmoded, along with the particular body shape they produced. Instead, slimness was the new ideal, with diet and exercise increasingly encouraged. 'Weight gain no longer symbolized health; it suggested weakened will-power and a potential loss of feminine appeal', whilst slimness 'reinforced affluent, middle-class social status' (Lowe, 1995: 42). Today, slimness remains an important ideal for middle-class women in particular, but to this has been added the additional demand of looking fit and toned (see Abbas, 2004; Martinez, 2015). Recent years have also seen the use of cosmetic surgery to alter the body's shape increase dramatically amongst women (Kay, 2015; BBC, 2016a), reflecting and reinforcing the unattainable body ideals that help provide the latest iteration of feminine body projects with their open-ended, elusive character.

Further evidence of the especially strong pressures on modern women to manage their bodily appearances is found in a large-scale study reported in Bennett et al. (2009), which found that women were substantially more likely to engage in a wide range of body modification/adornment practices than men, including having piercings, dieting, using a sunbed, having plastic surgery and cosmetic dentistry. Aside from having a tattoo, the only practice explicitly focused on body modification that was more popular amongst men in the study was body building. And indeed, the project of developing and maintaining a muscular physique appears to have become increasingly popular amongst young

men in recent years, perhaps driven by increased exposure to media representations of muscular role models from sport and pop culture (see Pritchard and Cramblitt, 2014; Mulgrew, Volcevski-Kostas and Rendell, 2014; Featherstone, 2010). It has been argued that to approach this highly worked-on body ideal without contravening gender norms that position aesthetic body practices as primarily feminine, men 'must simultaneously work on and discipline their bodies while disavowing any (inappropriate [i.e. feminine]) interest in their own appearance' (Gill, Henwood and McLean, 2005: 2). This dissonance between men's desire to manage the body's appearance and their wish not to appear inappropriately preoccupied with their looks, might help explain the high levels of men's involvement in sport: Long-term participation in football, cycling, or indeed running races, could be construed as part of a body project at least partially focused on developing a 'sporty' physique, cloaked in the appropriately masculine motivation of athletic competition.

Age too plays an important role in structuring the social distribution of body projects. Again turning to Bennett et al.'s (2009) comprehensive study, we find younger people are more likely to engage in activities relating to bodily adornment and aesthetics, such as having tattoos, using sunbeds and having piercings. They are also more likely to participate in body building. This mixture of permanent and provisional characteristics/activities suggests generational as well as 'change over time' based differences. Following Tulle (2008), it is possible that older people engaged in body projects may tend to prioritise maintaining good health and physical function as they age rather than foregrounding aesthetic considerations, although there is likely some overlap between the two given that healthy bodies are also currently considered aesthetically desirable (discussed below).

Sport England's (2016) Active People survey data (analysed in detail in chapter 5) as well as the Bennett et al. study show that occupational class is another social variable that helps structure the kinds of active leisure and bodily adornment practices people engage in in pursuit of their body projects. In part this can be linked straightforwardly to differences in economic resources. The cost of gym or tennis club memberships – or cosmetic surgery procedures - can present a



barrier to less well-off groups. And some forms of active leisure such as yachting or mountaineering require expensive kit. But as Falcoux and McLeod (2012) and De Luca (2011) have shown, the sites of active leisure frequented by the privileged can also present cultural barriers. The policing of middle-class etiquette and behavioural norms at tennis clubs, for instance, can make working-class people feel unwelcome. Likewise, an upper-middle-class person might feel out of place at an inner-city basketball or boxing club. Socially conditioned tastes too then, play a role in determining the kinds of practices an individual might employ in pursuit of their body projects. The role of taste is strongly illustrated in the case of tattoos, which, at the time of Bennett et al.'s 2009 study, were found to be much more popular with those in 'routine manual' occupations than they were with those educated to degree level or above.

Finally, ethnicity can also determine the range of possible body projects open to an individual. Historically some body related practices are more strongly associated with some ethnic groups than others, creating a kind of social inertia in terms of the practices people identify as 'for the likes of me'. But also, cultural and – especially - religious restrictions can have a powerful impact on some groups' engagement in particular body projects. For example, some interpretations of Islam restrict women's involvement in both sporting body projects and, more generally, their ability to use their bodies to project individual identities at all because of strictures around dress (Benn, Pfister and Jawads, 2011). The intersection of religious and gender identities can shape engagement in body projects in other, less restrictive ways too. Farooq and Parker (2009), for instance, describe how some Muslim boys' schools place an especially strong emphasis on participation in PE, leading pupils to value sport as a way to 'help them engender a more disciplined sense of self' (287), and to describe their bodies as 'a "gift from Allah" and that [they are] charged with the responsibility of taking care of' (288).

So, how can Giddens' notion of body projects help inform the current study? First, it helps sensitise us to the salience of the body in today's culture and emphasises how our bodies play an important role in helping define and express who we are. Running could certainly be construed as an important 'tool' in the

service of body projects, and indeed in the creation of late modern identity narratives based around leisure activities rather than work or wider social roles. Giddens also draws our attention to the array of alternative identities that appear to be open to us today (see Atkins, 2007). The expansion of leisure time and the proliferation of choice in relation to how we fill it has generated a diverse, heterogenous space in which identities can be expressed in ways that would not have been possible a few decades ago. Running sits within this universe of possibilities and attains its meanings in relation to its place within it. Where Giddens' model is less useful is in relation to the role of social position in structuring which of these choices people make. Not only access to resources, but also socially constructed norms and tastes, play important roles in shaping the options any individual will see as realistic choices (see Skeggs, 1997). Giddens' theory fails to acknowledge and accommodate this satisfactorily.

For Giddens, late modernity's ontological insecurity has led to 'lifestyle' attaining much greater salience as a source of meaning and identity in people's lives compared to work. Lifestyles can be understood as a constellation of practices, consumption choices and orientations unified by underlying meanings or values. Or in Giddens' words, they are 'a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces [to] give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens, 1991: 81). He goes on to argue that the stylisation of daily life has become inevitable: 'we not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense we are forced to do so – we have no choice but to choose' (ibid). Even rejecting all available lifestyles becomes a way of life with a unifying structure and meaning – a lifestyle in itself. In the next section I turn to examine the powerful role played by one particular type of lifestyle, the 'healthy lifestyle', in both providing a template for how to live *well* that is relevant to this study, and in helping to define the meanings attached to those who adhere to it, and those who do not.

### **2.3 Foucault, lifestyle, governmentality and healthism**

In some respects, there is nothing new about the fashion for healthy lifestyles. According to Xenophon (2008), Socrates encouraged regular exercise as a route to achieving full human potential, and in *The Republic*, Plato (2007) urged the

training of the (male) body to balance that of the mind. The latter also argued for 'temperance' in physical training, suggesting that many of his contemporaries were spending a lot of time – perhaps too much - at the gym, which was, of course, an important place for privileged men in classical Greek culture. And indeed, historically, the ability to apply oneself wholeheartedly to the pursuit of physical self-improvement *for its own sake* was largely the privilege of a small minority of leisured and wealthy male citizens. In recent decades however, access to leisure has been significantly democratised (see Robinson, 1978), and a version of the 'healthy lifestyle' has become accessible – at least in principle - to most people in the West. At the same time, becoming and staying healthy has been heavily promoted by all kinds of institutions and individuals, from governments and health services to celebrity chefs and health clubs. Under this regime of 'healthism' (Skrabanek, 1994), we are increasingly urged to take responsibility for our health and to admire those who 'look after themselves' whilst sneering at those who do not. 'Healthiness' has become a potent standard against which we can all be judged.

A useful way of thinking about how and why the healthy lifestyle has gained this powerful appeal in recent times can be derived from the writings of Michel Foucault. Perhaps most crucially, his ideas provide a way to explain how the seemingly personal choices of millions of people to adopt such similar ethics of self-care can be understood as coming about through the orchestrations of power in pursuit of its own wider biopolitical ends. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault (1995) describes a gradual transformation in the ways in which populations are governed. Centuries ago the means of control were essentially coercive and often violent. Brutal and public torture and lethal violence was meted out to punish miscreants and instil a sense of dread in the wider population. But over the last two hundred years or so, power has increasingly been exercised not through bodily punishment and dread, but by attempting to get citizens to internalise norms of behaviour that render them 'docile' or compliant in relation to the objectives of power (see Rose, 2012). An important element of this process is surveillance. Foucault described how individuals under 'the gaze' of power adapt their behaviours to avoid punishment, and that this

compliant behaviour was maintained even when the individual could not be certain whether - at any given moment - they were being watched or not. Eventually the sense of being surveilled is internalised – and the targets of surveillance begin to surveil themselves, maintaining ‘desirable’ behaviours even in the absence of external monitoring. Unlike centralised coercive state power, the sources of power in governmentality (the name Foucault gave to the way new forms of subjectivity are produced by power) are distributed throughout society. They can include government and big institutions, but also ‘micro-powers’ such as scientists, doctors, lawyers and other experts, as well as technologies, laws and standards that reinforce norms and measure citizens against them. And this ‘capillary’ form of power circulates even through individual citizens themselves, who, having internalised these norms, monitor and discipline both one another *and themselves* in accordance with the goals of the power they have come to embody.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault (2007) emphasises the special compatibility of the governmentality approach with modern, neoliberal society. Under such conditions, enterprise, freedom, choice and individual responsibility are idealised and promoted across many domains of social life, whilst the direct influence and power of government are curtailed. Rather than being dictated to by government or other powerful institutions, individuals are expected to become ‘entrepreneurs of themselves’, making choices, engaging in transactions and investing in a multitude of different and competing organisations and networks in pursuits of their own best interests (see Foucault, 2007). In this context, the idealised citizen is he or she who ‘manages these diverse networks... in the most responsible and prudent fashion vis-à-vis... their own happiness’ (McNay, 2009: 61). Howell and Ingram (2001: 330) describe this as generating a moral climate that, ‘embracing individualism and voluntarism, require[s] all citizens to do something for and about themselves’. Governmentality provides a way to manage such a notionally free ‘responsibilized’ population, essentially by regulating the norms that it uses to evaluate and choose behaviours. It thus enables what Miller and Rose (2008) call ‘government at a distance’, the orienting of populations towards specific choices that serve wider political ends

through ‘the indirect shaping of “free” social practices’ through norms (McNay, 2009: 57). The political, according to Mouffe (1996), is thus depoliticized, and instead plays out in a strongly moral register: We are expected – compelled - to look after ourselves.

Of special relevance to the current study are ideas about how this kind of regulation can be directed at population health, a form of governmentality described by Foucault (2007) as ‘biopower’. Mayes (2016) provides a detailed account of the ways in which, in recent years, biopower has been deployed to counter the perceived threat of the ‘obesity epidemic’, which is positioned as a danger to healthcare systems, economic productivity and even national security (see Mayes, 2016; Throsby, 2009). Once established<sup>1</sup>, this ‘urgent need’ can activate and harmonise a network of micro-powers, technologies, knowledges, regulations and forms of expertise around the idea of the ‘healthy lifestyle’. This network is primarily directed at setting and policing norms around individual behaviour and the body (see Mayes, 2016: 21). Living with the ensuing cacophony of normative guidance around healthy living coming from government, doctors, fitness tracking watches, celebrity chefs, personal trainers – not to mention friends, colleagues and family - inevitably leads many individuals to internalise these ‘healthy’ norms and to monitor and discipline their own behaviour in the light of them. Through this process, biopower can produce ‘loyal citizens that learn to govern themselves’ (Miller, 1993: ix) in politically expedient ways.

With obesity publicly positioned as a threat to national, i.e. collective, prosperity and security, those who appear to be failing to live up to ‘healthy’ norms can be vulnerable not only to the accusation of harming themselves, but also of an antisocial moral failing, ‘greedily gobbling up more than their fair share of scarce public resources’ (Throsby, 2012: 9). Being overweight, as a presumed marker of a lack of effort in relation to self-care, thus becomes an outward sign of a range of inner inadequacies (see Throsby, 2007), providing a justification for discipline ranging from ‘body shaming’ to calls for obese people to be charged more to fly

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<sup>1</sup> Critics, including scholars in critical obesity studies, challenge the establishment of any such simple relationship between obesity and ill-health (see Throsby, 2008).

on airlines (Singer, 2012) or to be refused some NHS treatments (Plattel, 2009). Blame and failure are central to this construction of overweightness, leaving those categorised as such open to censure, feelings of guilt and inducing the need to explain or excuse their weight with reference to biographical or biological accident rather than to a failure of self-entrepreneurship (see Throsby, 2007). Conversely, maintaining a 'healthy lifestyle' and looking fit and slim has become a signifier of responsibility, discipline and vitality (see Mayes, 2016) - a kind of virtue aesthetic. With so much at stake, the link between slimness and self-discipline is strongly policed, even to the extent that overweight people are accused of 'cheating' their way to a slim body through surgery or weight loss drugs (Throsby, 2009). Whilst a slim body is thus seen as something you should earn through self-control and hard work, achieving one without the use of willpower is seen as a kind of deception or dishonesty – as defrauding a symbolic order that equates slimness with moderation and responsible self-stewardship.

Numerous studies have drawn on Foucault's ideas to analyse practices of sport and active leisure. Allain and Marshall (2017), for instance, describe the ways in which older people are now encouraged to live 'active lives', with gym-goers internalising a moral hierarchy that positions themselves as responsible citizens who are 'authorized to survey and discipline the bodies of those "others" who will not or cannot engage in regular exercise' (402). Addressing the use of fitness apps to track activity levels, Depper and Howe, (2017: 99) argue that 'digital health technologies expand the parameters of surveillance upon the... body' and 'function as pedagogical devices... through which young people can learn how to value a desirable body in the pursuit of functional health'. And Foucault has also been used to help elucidate disciplinary practices within particular sporting milieu, for instance, Dorants and Knoppers (2013) describe how regulation and disciplinary techniques at boxing gyms shape norms around training practices and help determine which individuals are included or excluded from participation.

Likewise, Foucault's ideas can provide powerful insights into what underlies the modern enthusiasm for running. Particularly, they help address how running can be understood in the light of a trend towards responsabilization around health

that reflects wider changes in the operation of power under neoliberalism. Whilst Giddens emphasises how contemporary conditions facilitate free choice amongst lifestyle options, Foucault draws our attention towards the ways in which our liberty is hedged, constrained and disciplined. Also, more in line with Giddens, Foucault helps us understand running not simply as a means of attaining normative 'healthiness' for its own sake (or in the service of power), but also as a 'technique of the self', a 'reflective and voluntary [action] by which men [sic]... seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria' (Foucault, 1992: 10-11). Linked to this, Foucault and his followers' work also draws our attention to the importance and valorisation of the performance of self-discipline in a contemporary society with a shrinking welfare state and an increasing expectation on citizens to take responsibility for their own destinies across a wide range of domains, including health.

The ideas of both Giddens and Foucault provide vital insights into the salience of the body and of healthy lifestyles to people's identities in modern society. They also help connect the decisions people make in relation to these aspects of their lives and the wider social environment. These ideas will help inform the analysis that follows, but the overarching analytical framework I will deploy is drawn primarily from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Below I will outline his 'Theory of Practice', exploring how it has been used by other scholars researching sport, and lifestyle, and explaining its close compatibility with my study.

## **2.4 On Bourdieu**

### **2.4.1 The Theory of Practice**

According to Bourdieu himself, when he started out in sociology he was surprised by the emphasis many sociologists placed on social change and 'mutation': 'Everything is undergoing mutation, [they say]... men are changing because women are changing etc... but it seems to me that there's stability, there's inertia' (Sociology is a Martial Art film, 2002). All around him, Bourdieu observed the essentially conservative nature of society, and especially how the

trajectories of people's lives seemed so often to reproduce those of their parents. He set out to explain this fact, and to describe the process through which life outcomes and society reproduced themselves across generations. This was an important goal, for it would mean revealing the hidden mechanisms through which social inequality is entrenched, potentially providing practical knowledge that could act as the basis for social change. However, in order to achieve this Bourdieu would have to address one of the oldest and thorniest problems in philosophy, that of structure and agency: How is it that we feel essentially free, yet our lives appear to unfold in ways that are predictable based on our social backgrounds? As Bourdieu himself put it, 'all of my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 65). The answer he provided was very different to that proposed by Foucault.

Although Bourdieu famously focused on the role of class in the generation of habitus, his tools have much wider applicability. Indeed, whilst for many years 'Bourdieu had little to say about women or gender' (Thorpe, 2009: 492), one of his later works, 'Masculine Domination' (Bourdieu, 2001), examined the (re)production of gender inequality. Here he argued that 'masculine domination assumes a natural, self-evident status through its inscription in the objective structures of the social world' (McNay, 2000: 37), which are internalised and reproduced through the gendered habitus. Although the reception of this work amongst feminist scholars was initially lukewarm at best, its ideas have inspired much work and gained many supporters since (see Thorpe, 2009).

When it came to the role of ethnicity as a formative social variable in Western society, Bourdieu was even quieter than he was on gender. This blind spot should be understood, however, in the context of French laws that forbid the collection of ethnic data in the surveys that were a vital part of Bourdieu's method. Fortunately, the logic of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is as applicable to categories of ethnicity as it is to those of class, and his tools have been used fruitfully to this effect by numerous scholars (e.g. Lee, 2013; Du, 2011). Indeed, it is the universal, transposable nature of Bourdieu's ideas across research contexts



that has helped his approach attain its high levels of utilisation by researchers today.

Bourdieu comprehended a social cosmos made up of numerous variably autonomous 'fields' relating to specific areas of social life. Within each field an essentially competitive social dynamic played out, with individuals vying to take up the best positions – i.e. those that bestow the greatest status and rewards. Crucially, the rules that governed each of these competitive spaces did not generate an even playing field, but rather favoured those who entered the 'game' with certain existing resources. This made some people more likely to succeed in taking up high status, rewarding positions than others (see Thomson, 2012). Despite the relative autonomy of different fields, people with the same sorts of social background, i.e. the affluent middle-classes (especially, one should add, its white and male members), tended to occupy powerful positions in many fields. For Bourdieu, this was evidence that the middle-classes entered fields pre-armed with a powerful arsenal of socially valuable resources that were largely the endowment of their upbringings. This wasn't *just* a matter of family money buying opportunities or the old boys' network providing a leg up. Bourdieu showed that more subtle advantages were also bestowed upon privileged children during their formative years. Intangible, embodied resources in socially valued forms such as a good education, broad cultural knowledge, particular ways of seeing and talking about the world, and certain styles of dress, speaking or moving were also inculcated in the family homes, at school and (importantly for this study) in the sports and other pastimes enjoyed by the privileged (see Stempel, 2005; Horne et al. 2011). An example of this kind of class habitus inculcation through sport is provided by Jorgensen, Edwards and Skinner (2002) in the context of an Australian junior golf club, where boys and girls are trained in the habits and manners of golfing culture, which, they argue, map closely onto those of the 'conservative middle-class'. Many scholars have noted the important role of sport in the inculcation of gender habitus, particularly around masculinity (see Gorley, Holdroyd and Kirk, 2003). Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2012), for instance, describe the role of the junior football coach in conveying expectations and shaping norms around masculinity, and Light and Kirk (2000)

described a similar form of cultural inculcation in high school rugby. The 'cultural capital' developed through these formative experiences would, according to Bourdieu's model, influence these boys' success in the fields of social and professional competition experienced in later life.

This helped explain the abiding structure of social space – how certain groups were able to maintain their dominant position atop society over time – but did not address the issue of our intuitive sense of personal agency. Why was it that, for the most part, we took up our predictable social positions, participated in our predictable activities and purchased our predictable goods without a sense of coercion, and indeed, often with the relish of expressing unique personal identities? Bourdieu argued that the key to this question was taste. Taste feels like something intensely personal; the style of clothes we wear, the activities we partake in, the choice of newspaper we read or where we go shopping all feel like expressions of our individuality. And Bourdieu concurred that they were, but added the vital caveat that our individualities have to be understood as products of our social background. He argued that taste, like other forms of cultural capital, is largely inculcated early in life through the home and school environment. As a result, people from similar backgrounds tended to develop similar tastes, with different tastes being associated with different 'class fractions', gender identities or other categories of social experience. These tastes were the unifying factors – 'stylistic affinities' (Bennett et al. 2009: 26) – that underpinned clusters of practices from a wide range of domains (including sports participation) that made up the 'lifestyles' associated with particular social groups (see Stempel, 2005). Because of this relationship, seeming expressions of individuality function as expressions of social position, producing and reinforcing 'a sense of one's place' (Bourdieu, 2010) in social space and signifying this position to others.

Bourdieu dedicated significant time to discussing sport's role in the process of social reproduction (see Bourdieu, 2010; Bourdieu, 1978). Each sport (or, more precisely, each way of 'doing' a sport), he argued, was associated with a particular region of social space both as a result of 'agents'...practical knowledge of [the sport's] distribution among agents who are themselves distributed into

ranked classes' (Bourdieu, 2010: 208) and the relationship of each sport's particular principles, characteristics and values to the dispositions of different social groups. And indeed, numerous studies since have supported the idea of sports participation as a socially classifying, reproductive practice in a variety of national contexts (e.g. Ohl, 2000; Scheerder et al., 2002; Lenartowicz, 2016). Thus, different forms of sports participation can be understood both as signifiers of social position and socially structured sites of training, where individuals imbibe the dispositions and characteristics valued by their social group.

In order to help apply these insights to practical research problems Bourdieu developed a set of thinking tools that provide researchers with ways of coming to grips with and conceptualising particular social contexts and practices. The most important of these – habitus, capital and field – I have touched on implicitly or explicitly above. Next though, I will provide more detailed explanations of these concepts along with some useful refinements from other researchers. I will also show how these concepts apply in this study.

#### **2.4.2 Habitus**

As we have seen, one of the key objectives of Bourdieu's thinking was to move beyond the impasse created by the problem of structure and agency. Essentially, he wanted to explain how temporally stable social regularities can emerge in the context of a society made up of millions of individual agents. How can we explain, for example, why working-class children tend to aspire to working-class jobs (see Willis, 2016), art gallery visitors are more likely to come from the middle-class, the majority of yoga practitioners are women whilst most boxers are men (Reeves, 2012), or indeed, why runners are drawn disproportionately from the middle-class (see chapter five). An obvious way to begin to answer some of these questions would be that people's choices are limited by material restraints that block access to some courses of action, for example a lack of money can prevent working-class people from affording to attend the opera or join a tennis club. This is the argument that underlies Veblen's (2007) notion of 'conspicuous leisure', which described how certain leisure practices gained their meaning as markers of social status because they required access to economic resources (and leisure time) unavailable to most people. But for Bourdieu this

was only part of the picture, and failed to account for much of the data he collected during numerous empirical investigations. Also, material barriers could not account for the fact that we appear to take up and perform our seemingly pre-determined social positions so willingly, making a virtue of whichever courses we are obliged (structurally speaking) to take (see Bourdieu, 2010).

Bourdieu argued that we can make sense of this if we think about the social environment as *constitutive* of agents rather than simply as an external impelling or limiting force. In other words, we need to understand ourselves as products of a particular set of lived experiences (especially childhood at home and school) manifest in a set of predispositions towards certain ways of thinking and perceiving, and in the ways we look, move and act. These predispositions and tendencies are what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, an embodied structure that is 'pregnant with [personal] history' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 124), a system of durable, transposable dispositions (see Bourdieu, 1990b) shaped by our social experiences and '*applicable, by simple transfer, to the most varied areas of practice*' (Bourdieu, 2010: 166). Through its role in defining taste, behaviour and aspiration it acts to constrain individual agency, limiting the practices, roles or positions that are 'visible', attractive or viable within any field of social life (see Bourdieu, 2005). As habitus is a product of experience, with upbringing, schooling and other formative experiences generating dispositions, tastes, styles and orientations to the world, it follows that those with similar social backgrounds will also have similar habitus. As such, habitus represents the embodiment of a particular location in social space, defined in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and many other factors that bear on lived experience. Hence, the 'social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds' (Bourdieu, 1984: 471) and bodies (see Christensen and Carpiano, 2014), with the result that our social position becomes an integral part of who we are, colouring our expectations and aspirations, the way we look and move, as well as the way we perceive the world and act within it. Consequently, our actions – how we talk and hold ourselves, the things we buy and consume, how we dress, and the sports we play – become potent signifiers of our 'native' position in social space. An example of this in relation to sport is provided by Holland-Smith (2016), who

discusses how particular formative experiences associated with the upbringing of middle-class boys help shape their habitus in ways that prepare them and inculcate a taste for mountaineering, a sport through which their middle-class masculinity is signified and reproduced.

Despite the statistical relationships between certain types of social background and 'success' in various spheres of social life, it does not follow that one form of habitus can be said to be of greater *intrinsic* worth than any other (see Maton, 2012). A habitus only becomes socially valuable in contact with a social field, where it acquires a specific, local value. A habitus that is well-fitted to the field acts as a form of capital within its boundaries, where it can 'buy' status to the extent of its correspondence with the attributes valorised by the powerful agents that define the field's logic (see Moore, 2012). Not all social fields are created equal, however, with some providing much greater rewards than others. A habitus well-equipped to thrive in the most profitable fields, such as the employment market, is therefore a powerful resource for achieving social and economic success. As such, those parents with the resources to do so often invest a great deal of time and money in inculcating this kind of habitus in their children, both at home and via schooling. Sport is one of the 'tools' used in this process (Shilling, 1992), helping to develop ways of using and managing the body (what Bourdieu calls 'hexis') and building the confidence and pride that are valued in elite jobs (Horne et al. 2011). Recently, the former head of Eton school has claimed that learning harsh lessons on the sports field equips highly privileged boys to succeed in the competitive environment of their adult working lives (BBC, 2016b). The development of a habitus well-adjusted to the top rungs of the social ladder 'is a complex and lengthy process which can last for years' (Shilling, 1992: 15), with sport participation often carefully regulated by middle-class parents to ensure exactly the right middle-class, gender and ethnicity-appropriate attitudes and bodily attributes are being internalised during childhood (see Stuij and Stokvis, 2011; Falcous and Mcleod, 2012). DeLuca (2016), for instance, describes how upmarket swimming clubs offer privileged parents a site at which their children can internalise middle-class values and etiquette in the company of peers from similar backgrounds. Supporting the

hypothesis that sport is used more strategically by the middle-class to inculcate habitus, a study by Nielsen et al. (2012) shows that whilst there was no relationship between the overall levels of physical activity of children and their socioeconomic status, children from higher status backgrounds participated in significantly more *organised* sport than those of lower status, who tended to be more active in *ad hoc* activities. In other words, children's family background plays a central role in determining the kinds of sporting socialisation they receive (see Mennesson, Bertrand and Court, 2017).

In the context of this study, dispositions of the habitus connected to our relationship with our bodies are especially pertinent. Bourdieu states that 'the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste' (Bourdieu, 1984: 190), making our bodies (and the bodies we aspire to) powerful signifiers of our underlying habitus and social position. Empirical studies have shown how body shape ideals vary with factors such as class (Abbas, 2004), age (Dittmar et al. 2000), gender (Forbes et al. 2001) and ethnicity (Kemper et al. 1994), suggesting that these variables may play an important explanatory role in shaping the choice of body projects people engage in around running. But of course, the valorisation of bodies is not just about appearances. The way the body is used – for example whether or not it is held aloof from interpersonal violence or the speed at which it moves – are also indicators of particular tastes, dispositions and hexis. But beyond issues bearing directly on the body, choices around engagement in running are also open to the influence of other, more abstract tastes. For example, attitudes to the solitary, individualistic nature of running could influence its appeal to different groups (see Bourdieu, 2010: 214); variations in sensibilities around natural and urban landscapes could influence the forms of running individuals participate in (see Carfagna et al., 2014); attitudes towards commercialisation, competition and 'mass participation' events could also help structure engagement in forms of running along social lines (see Atkinson, 2010), as could those towards risk-taking and dangerous sport (see Lyng, 2005).

The choice to run – including exactly how the sport is practised – and the possession of a 'runner's body' (or the aspiration to do so) can thus be

understood as a socially validated signal of particular values, tastes and embodied attributes that bespeak an individual's position in social space. In other words, they can be interpreted as a manifestation of habitus and a performance of social identity. Running itself, like other sports, can also be viewed as a tool for the deliberate shaping of habitus in order to approach certain ideals, some of which may have value in other fields of social life. The concept of habitus thus provides this study with a way of conceptualising the relationship between running and identity, and a means to explain variations in the sport's appeal depending on how closely its characteristics fit with those of different social groups.

### **2.4.3 Capital**

Capital is a term most usually associated with the economic sphere, with classical economic theory explaining behaviour in terms of the self-interested pursuit of economic capital in the form of financial assets or the means of their generation. But for Bourdieu, focusing solely on the economic dimension of social interaction and dismissing other forms of exchange as 'disinterested' (i.e. not being about maximising personal advantage) impoverishes our understanding of both human behaviour and the workings of the social world. Economic capital is indeed a key currency in the 'universe of exchanges', Bourdieu agreed, but other types of capital operate too, in forms he described as social, cultural and symbolic (see Bourdieu, 2002). The hidden equivalence between these different sorts of asset and the 'misrecognised' exchange economy they facilitate enables conversion between economic and non-economic resources, helping to explain the 'remarkable' fact 'that the practices and assets... salvaged from the "icy water of egotistical calculation" [i.e. those usually regarded as disinterested and 'above' economic consideration]... are the virtual monopoly of the dominant class' (Bourdieu, 2002: 281). In other words, Bourdieu's recognition of the possibility of exchanging economic with other forms of capital explained how those dominant in the economic sphere also tended to take up dominant positions in wider cultural life.

As mentioned, Bourdieu highlights three forms of non-economic capital: social, cultural and symbolic. Social capital is derived from the value of personal

networks, as encapsulated in the saying 'it's not what you know, but who you know'. Cultural capital includes assets such knowledge, taste, skills, personal style or education that are prized by society (here the potential of habitus to act as a form of cultural capital is apparent). And symbolic capital represents resources based on honour, prestige or reputation. Implicit in Bourdieu's work is a further category of capital (really a subcategory of cultural capital) that Shilling (2004) calls 'physical capital' and Wacquant (2004) termed 'bodily capital'. This relates specifically to the value attached to bodies themselves. This notion has proved particularly useful in the study of sport, health and fitness (e.g. Wacquant, 2004; Maconachie and Sappey, 2011; Tulle and Dorrer, 2012), and will be explored below. Each of these types of capital is a resource that, to varying extents and in different contexts, enhances the agency of its bearers, and thus their capacity to exercise power over their own lives, and sometimes those of others.

All forms of capital are 'weapons and stakes' (Bourdieu, 2002: 284) in a competitive struggle over the social positions that offer the greatest status and rewards (in terms of access to ever more capital). Bourdieu privileges economic and cultural capital as key assets in defining individuals' chances of success in this struggle and structuring the social world. However, he makes a crucial distinction between the two: In the case of economic capital the 'instrumental and self-interested nature of the exchange is transparent. Mercantile exchange is not of intrinsic value, but always a means to an end' (Moore, 2012: 100), whereas cultural capital's exchange value – and therefore its equivalence with economic capital – is denied or suppressed. Cultural assets are instead presented as possessing an intrinsic value transcending the grubby world of social competition and exchange. So whilst the values of things like the *beauty* of a physique, the *elegance* of a person's manners, or the *nobility* of a sportsperson's conduct are in fact reducible to their current exchange value within dynamic and objectively foundationless social fields, they are 'misrecognised' as possessing essences that transcend time and place, beyond matters of self-interest, profit and power. Understanding this sensitises us to the possibility that seemingly parochial,



running-specific forms of physical/cultural capital could in fact carry value far beyond the boundaries of the field of running itself.

Converting economic capital into embodied cultural capital that projects the impression of intrinsic personal value is a key mechanism through which privilege is reproduced. British public schools have a long tradition of acting as convertors of economic capital (school fees) into cultural capital such as good exam grades and a 'cultured' accent, but also – via sports - into 'character' and physical capital in the form of 'bodily orientations... recognised by the higher professions as markers of distinction' that were once 'prerequisites for entry into elite occupations' (Shilling, 1992: 14). Today private education 'continue[s] to provide pupils with physical capital in the forms of management of the body, dress, manners and speech, which along with confidence and pride, are attributes valued in elite jobs' (Horne et al. 2011: 868). Once such well-prepared people reach the high-status positions of power for which they have been groomed they are in a strong position to defend the hierarchies of discrimination that support the illusion of the intrinsic value of their abilities or manners, and hence, legitimise their social and cultural – as well as economic - dominance. This process relies on the tacit complicity of those in weaker positions in society, who accept the 'rules of the game' (*doxa*) prescribed by the powerful, and that the game is worth playing (*illusio*), even though the rules are stacked against them. Bourdieu describes the maintenance of this uneven playing field based on the misrecognition and naturalisation of power as 'symbolic violence', an emotive term used to highlight its role in the suppression of the already weak, and the inequality, misery and suffering it causes (see Schubert, 2012). Symbolic violence is almost imperceptible, an insidious form of suppression that you 'absorb like air, something you don't feel pressured by, it is everywhere and nowhere, and to escape it is very difficult' (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Egleton, 1992: 111). Symbolic violence allows the powerful in any given field to 'let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination' (Bourdieu, 2005: 189).

Sports are some of the many practices through which forms of capital can be expressed, cultivated and interchanged. Each sport enables the cultivation of a

different blend of embodied attributes, from hexis and body shape to skills, manners, language and etiquette (see Bourdieu, 2010). Access to the sports that confer the most valuable cultural attributes (i.e. those valued by powerful social groups) such as club-based tennis (see Falcous and McLeod, 2012), club swimming (see Deluca, 2013), golf (Jorgensen, Edwards and Skinner, 2002) and climbing (Holland-Smith, 2016) is restricted by *doxa* – norms of behaviour and appearance - as well as financial barriers, which make it difficult for those with little existing economic or middle-class cultural capital to participate. As a result, those already rich in these forms of capital have much greater access to the valuable capital obtained through participation in prestigious sports. Those without the requisite capital, on the other hand, are alienated and without (usually) being directly refused entry to these sports, steer a course for other practices which reproduce their own lower status by offering less culturally valuable rewards (see Wilson, 2002). Many indoor sports such as darts, snooker and bowling fall into this category (Reeves, 2012), perhaps because of their association with working-class social environments such as the pub. Gender, as well as class, plays an important role in choices around sports participation. The indoor, predominantly working-class sports mentioned above are also highly gendered, with women significantly underrepresented. The opposite is true of sports like netball, aerobics and yoga (Sport England, 2016). This highlights the powerful role played by the *doxa* of sporting fields in creating a hostile or welcoming environment depending on a participant's gender. This implies that gender habitus can work as forms of embodied cultural capital, enhancing agency in some fields and restricting it in others (see McCall, 1992).

As well as offering participants a way of expressing and reproducing social position in the context of the wider universe of choices around sports participation, running also acts as a specific local economy in which specialised forms of embodied capital are valorised and can be converted into other resources. For runners, the embodied capacity to run fast has special cultural value. This makes it a form of physical capital (Shilling, 2004) within the field, enabling its possessors to obtain symbolic, social and – for a few - even economic rewards. We can think of this as 'athletic capital'. As well as being converted into

other forms, athletic capital can also become *objectified* as, for instance, medals, trophies or club vests. These objects symbolise and reinforce their possessor's status within the sport, allowing ephemeral sporting achievements to 'live on', providing a resource for the creation and maintenance of highly valued athletic identities (see Collinson and Hockey, 2005).

Athletic capital is not, however, the only form of capital active within the field of running. As Crossley (2004) has shown, even the most seemingly body-centric activities are in fact deeply social. Participating in running usually involves making and maintaining relationships – social capital - as well as athletic bodies (see, from another sporting context, Okayasu, Kawahara and Nogawa, 2010). Nettleton (2013) has shown how athletic capital and social capital are linked through shared experiences amongst fell-runners, who swap stores of stories about running (what she calls 'existential capital') to build group identity and friendships. Prestigious positions such as coach or club manager offer ways of converting athletic and wider cultural capital into status, symbolic, social and sometimes economic capital. And of course, economic capital is also active in directly determining the kinds of events, races and equipment runners have access to. Whether for an elite runner, a 'middle of the pack' finisher, a coach or a club manager, running confers a wide range of potential rewards. Thinking of these in terms of capital helps us to get to grips with the ways in which they are obtained and displayed, and how they relate both to the dispositions and resources runners bring to the sport, and to the structure and meaning of the sport itself.

#### **2.4.4 Field**

Completing the triumvirate of interlocking concepts that define Bourdieu's approach, *fields* provide the local social context in which habitus and other forms of capital are rendered meaningful and potent. Examples include the field of the legal profession, of artistic production or, indeed, of athletics. Achievements, abilities or behaviours that are valued and rewarded in one field might be worthless in another, but the combination of the advantages accrued across every field in which individuals are active combine to determine their overall

social position. For Bourdieu, each field operates as a kind of sub-game in the overall game of social life (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu (2010) makes a distinction between fields of production and fields of consumption. In the field of production cultural goods are created and competition is between producers – in the case of running, between different race organisers, sportswear manufacturers and organising bodies competing for prestige, legitimacy and often, economic capital. This field (which includes all entities creating opportunities for participation, whether commercially motivated or not) creates the universe of forms of experience and expression possible in the field of consumption at any one time. Here we find individuals competing for status through the goods and services (races, medals, experiences, clothing, equipment) they consume or participate in. Bourdieu argues that these fields, despite being organised by ‘two relatively independent logics’ (227), are related. Production renders up a ‘system of stylistic possibles’ (228) from which consumers can choose in accordance with their tastes and resources. These structuring factors create an association between constellations of different goods and services (lifestyles) and specific regions of social space – those inhabited by their consumers.

Social fields ‘are the products of a long, slow process of autonomization’ (Bourdieu, 1990b: 67) in advanced societies, in which social life has been split into (variably) independent spheres. The ongoing historical constitution of each field – through contestation by interested agents (Webb et al. 2002) - leads to its particular set of rules, institutions, principles, values and taken-for-granted assumptions (the field’s doxa), which provide the means to evaluate the behaviours, assets and attributes (i.e. habitus and capital) of those active within its borders. It is hence only within the local framework of a field that social action or achievement obtains its social value. At stake for field participants is access to capital, and they compete to take up the positions (roles, identities) within the field that provide access to it in the maximum possible volume. But fields are not egalitarian spaces; not all positions are accessible to all agents. As we have seen, existing levels of capital constrain the positions and choices that are visible, viable and attractive to agents at any given time. The rules of each field thus

favour some agents over others. In this sense fields can be 'classed', 'gendered', 'aged' and 'raced', with rules and principles (*doxa*) that inherently favour one group or another. The *doxa* of a sporting field like that of boxing is structured by age, ethnicity, gender and class, for instance. As described by Wacquant (2004), its norms and laws require the enactment of a form of rugged working-class masculinity that presents a barrier to many women and middle-class men, and in his case, his 'whiteness' positioned him as an outsider who needed to prove his seriousness to the other boxers at his Chicago gym<sup>2</sup>. Horse racing presents an interesting case study in the power of *doxa* acting within a field to structure its outcomes. Whilst the majority of those entering the field aspiring to become jockeys are women, its gendered *doxa* and inherent symbolic violence act to thin their ranks until women represent only a tiny minority of those who rise to the level of race jockey (Butler and Charles, 2012). The policing of norms around social behaviour can act to discourage those from different backgrounds from taking an active part in certain sporting fields, even when financial barriers fail (see Lattanzio, 2009). Deluca (2013) describes how a 'harmony of habitus' (Bourdieu, 2005: 82) can be created and policed within particular sports through the creation of what she calls 'largely impenetrable, yet invisible, boundaries' (Deluca, 2013: 342) formed of the field's *doxa*, making the field an inhospitable, uncomfortable environment for people of the 'wrong' class, gender or ethnic characteristics.

Fields, as well as being structured and accessed via forms of cultural capital are also sites where cultural capital is produced. Time spent submerged within a field, under the influence of its *doxa*, norms and hierarchies gradually leads to an internalisation of a pragmatic sense of how to get along and get ahead within its boundaries. But as well as this kind of cultural osmosis, fields are also places where a deliberate process of learning or training to improve one's volumes of embodied capital can take place (see, for a sporting example, Wacquant, 2004). There is a particularly high premium placed on this kind of training in the field of

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<sup>2</sup> In some places, identity politics around boxing have become increasingly strained in recent years because of its growing popularity with white 'elite professionals' such as bankers, as well as with women. For some, this is seen as an unwelcome colonisation of a former working-class male bastion (see Trimbur, 2013).

running, where deliberately building fitness through running regularly is the only realistic way to improve the race performances that are valued in the field.

Despite the degree of stability in fields, which makes them meaningful and navigable to the individuals who enter them, they are not static social spaces. Disruptions and transformations to the prevailing order occur when the authority of dominant agents and the doxa they produce is challenged by the dominated within a field. This can lead to changes in the 'rules of the game', including the forms of capital and habitus valorised within the field, and hence the status of the types of agent operating within it. In order for this to happen, dominated agents have to recognise the doxa for what it is – an arbitrary set of principles imposed from above that are open to challenge – and that their own positions in the field are not natural, but enforced through 'symbolic violence'. If these conditions are met the *illusio* of the field – the sense that the game is 'worth playing' – can be undermined, and the way is opened to challenge and change. In practical terms this can occur in several ways, including through concerted action by the dominated through refusal to participate or abide by the field's rules (for example through a strike or boycott), undermining the powerbase of the authorities of the field and forcing concessions or their irrelevance. Alternatively, dominated agents in one field can draw on transposable capital built up in other fields in which they have more power, or build alliances with powerful external agents to increase their assets within a field and unbalance the old order. The present state of the field of running, like any other, is, as we shall see in chapter four, the history of these struggles reified, just as habitus is personal history embodied (see Hilgers and Mangez, 2015).

Applying the concept of field to running is useful in several ways. First, thinking about running as a field of production helps us conceptualise the struggles between competing organisations to define and dominate the sport and to obtain legitimacy, and thus to access the economic capital that flows through the field. Whilst shaped in part by runners' tastes and needs, this competition between producers is an important factor shaping the positions available within the field of consumption, in which runners choose (in the light of their holdings of different forms of capital) between different ways of participating in the sport

that reflect different values and meanings. And choices made here can be understood as just one<sup>3</sup> amongst many 'stylistic possibles' in the wider field of consumption that enables individuals to say something about who they are and what they stand for. Finally, running also encompasses a sporting field - of teams, races and records - in which individuals develop and deploy athletic capital to achieve status within the sport's competitive hierarchies.

## 2.5 The serious leisure perspective

Having looked at the work of three important scholars that bears on the study of leisure and running in different ways, and before going on to look at empirical studies relating specifically to running, it would be remiss not to mention the 'serious leisure perspective'. Whilst this research tradition is not centre stage in this study, I will draw on some of its insights, both directly and through its influence on many of the empirical papers I cite throughout the study. And indeed, in a number of important respects, the serious leisure perspective's conceptualisations of leisure and sport echo the theories I have described above.

In recent years, the serious leisure perspective has provided an influential framework for thinking specifically about how people in the modern West use their leisure time. Theorists of 'serious leisure' identify it as one of three types of leisure activity:

- *Casual leisure*, which includes intrinsically rewarding, pleasurable and relatively short-lived activities that require no special training to engage in. This could include relaxation, watching TV or play.
- *Project-based leisure* involves short-term, goal-oriented undertakings that require planning and effort, but are not intended to develop into a long-term commitment. This might include designing a new garden or planning Christmas celebrations.
- *Serious leisure* is long-term, systematic engagement in a leisure activity that is interesting and fulfilling enough to provide a 'leisure career',

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<sup>3</sup> Or more accurately, running is a cluster of related 'stylistic possibles' depending on how it is performed.

through which skills, knowledge and experience are acquired and expressed (adapted from Elkington and Stebbins, 2014: 4).

Serious leisure is further characterised by its association with a 'social world' (see Unruh, 1980) or community of practice, with its own ethos, values, beliefs, goals, routines and organisations, reminding us of Bourdieu's field with its doxa. It also provides participants with an opportunity for self-expression, feelings of accomplishment and a distinctive identity linked to their chosen pursuit. Again, this could be interpreted in Bourdieusian terms, with position and status in the field linked to the accrual of cultural capital within it, and with lifestyle practices acting as the basis of wider social identities. And this quality has been highlighted within the serious leisure perspective as especially pertinent in a world in which traditional work-based identities have become less important (see Blackshaw, 2010), echoing Giddens' writings on 'ontological insecurity' and body projects. In this reading, the leisure career has eclipsed the work career as a key source of identity in 21<sup>st</sup> century life. The serious leisure perspective then, helps to emphasise the fundamental role running could play in the lives of many of its more committed participants. It also reminds us of how running is implicated in a much wider landscape of varied leisure practices that support an array of different social identities.

Critics of the serious leisure perspective have argued that it often fails to acknowledge the gendered, classed and 'raced' nature of both access to pursuits classed as serious leisure, and even what constitutes 'seriousness' itself (see Breeze, 2013; Dilley and Scraton, 2010). But rather than being a reason to reject the perspective out of hand, these challenges – and the inequality-generating mechanisms they have helped identify - can alert us to potential ways in which social inequalities might emerge in the specific context of running. And it is in this respect in particular that the serious leisure perspective will be deployed in this study.

Over the course of this chapter so far, I have looked at some of the important ideas, theories and traditions that will inform and structure my study of running. I have included in this discussion a range of examples of how these ideas have been applied to the study of sport, active leisure and the 'healthy lifestyle' by



other researchers. Now though, I turn my attention to existing empirical studies that bear specifically on running, irrespective of research tradition, to highlight the contribution to wider sociological knowledge made by this thesis.

## **2.6 Empirical perspectives**

Of course, I am not the first social scientist to explore the phenomenon of recreational running. Runners' motivations have been a target of investigation by sociologists and psychologists since at least the 1970s and early 1980s. An early effort was a survey of over 900 American runners by Jorgenson and Jorgenson (1981), which described how runners associated improvements in physical and emotional well-being as well as decreased illness with participation in their sport. Other studies have highlighted the motivations for achievement (Duda, 1989), for competition (Harter, 1981) and to lose weight (McGuire et al. 1998). Evidence that running is perceived as offering a way to manage and reduce mental distress due to factors like overwork or family pressures has been described by Tucker (1990). Borgers, Vos and Scheerder (2015) suggest that the opportunity for social contact is another important factor motivating continued involvement in the sport. A meta-analysis of studies looking at marathon runners' motivations was published by Masters et al. (1993), and formed the basis of a nine factor motivational typology, which highlighted a range of psychological, achievement, social and physical motives for running. Largely though, quantitative studies of the reasons why people run have drawn on a psychological view of motivation, and thus fail to address the vital question of how such motivations are constituted socially.

Internationally there have been many studies describing the social makeup of running, including Lance and Antshel (1981), Serravallo (2000), Hallmann et al. (2015), Doupona Topic and Rauter (2015) and Breedveld, Scheerder and Borgers (2015). Universally, these studies have painted a similar picture, with running dominated by middle-class white men (although with a significant increase in women runners over recent years). Few of these, however, make any effort to discern differences between how different social groups participate in running, or between different communities of practice within running, which, from jogging to sprinting and obstacle course racing to ultramarathoning, is a very

diverse sport. Vos and Scheerder (2009) and Forsberg (2012; 2015) are slight exceptions to this rule, suggesting various categories of runner based on cluster analyses of Flemish and Danish runners respectively. These typologies, however, only cover long-distance road runners, provide little demographic detail and make no attempt to account for the differences in practice and motivation between groups sociologically.

As well as these 'big picture' quantitative studies, numerous more specialised works have focused their attention on specific aspects of running culture. Abbas (2004) discusses the relationship between running and the middle-class body. Nettleton (2013) explores sociality amongst fell-runners. Tulle (2008) has written about the role running can play in resisting the 'narrative of decline' in old age. Allen-Collinson (2012) has written extensively on the phenomenology of distance running (see also Hockey and Collinson, 2017). And Lyng (1990) and others have described running as a form of 'edgework', a liminal experience at the limits of normal human experience. This survey of existing literature will be extended within the historical analysis of chapter four.

Where this study fundamentally differs from what has gone before, is its combination of 'big picture' quantitative and more intimate qualitative methods to describe the social terrain and personal meanings of running, and in its conception of running as a social field in itself, with different but related practices associated with subtly different meanings, lifestyles and social groups. Here running is not treated as a single, monolithic social practice, but as a constellation of sub-practices, related, yet socially and culturally quite distinct. This combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enables me to avoid the clumsy assumptions about the universality of experience that the serious leisure perspective has sometimes been accused of, whilst still managing to paint a picture of the broad cultural landscape of running.

## **2.7 Summary and conclusion**

Over the course of this chapter I have outlined three important theoretical positions that help contextualise and inform this work. In ascending order of significance for what follows, I have described Giddens' work on body projects,

Foucault's ideas around governmentality and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Briefly, I have also drawn attention to the serious leisure perspective, an important tradition of research around sporting pastimes, from which I will draw insights in the analysis that follows. As well as these broader perspectives, I have looked at some of the empirical work on running that has been generated across traditions, highlighting the gaps in knowledge and perspective that this study will fill. As I have already mentioned, chapter four continues this survey in the context of a historical analysis of the development of running over several centuries, and includes a wealth of further research on running and sporting leisure more generally. It also adds Elias' 'civilizing process' to the frameworks provided by the triumvirate of thinkers I have focused on in this section.

The theories proposed by the key thinkers outlined in this chapter and chapter four are distinctive, each offering unique and valuable insights, yet they share also a great deal in common. All four emphasise our status as embodied beings. In different ways they all propose a view of the body as, in part, a social resource that can be imbued with value and thus act as a form of currency that locates an individual in social space. As such, all theorise bodies as an anchor to our social identities. Foucault's work helps us see that these embodied identities have a strong ethical dimension, which Bourdieu would add, is employed in the system of symbolic violence that interprets social and historical contingencies (in this case in the relationship between body shape and social class) as differences in the essential (moral) quality of different groups. The three theories discussed in this chapter, as well as Elias's, which I discuss in chapter four, also all bear heavily on the concept of lifestyle as a central organising principle of modern life, whether with regards to the performance and reproduction of social identity (Bourdieu), the provision of structure and meaning (Giddens), or as a normatively prescribed manifestation of governmentality (Foucault). Indeed, many of the concepts and insights contained in these theories echo and complement each other, as illustrated by proposed syntheses of Bourdieu and Foucault (e.g. Schlosser, 2013; Bennett, 2010), Bourdieu and Giddens (see Adams, 2006) and Bourdieu and Elias (e.g. Paulle, van Heerikhuizen and Emirbayer, 2012). Rather than attempting such a theoretical synthesis, in this

study I prioritise the work of Bourdieu as the overarching theoretical framework, but draw on related ideas and concepts provided by the other writers as well as relevant writings from other traditions when they help illuminate specific aspects of the data at hand. Giddens, Foucault and Elias each prove useful in different ways and at different points in the thesis. Giddens primarily provides context, sensitising us to the salience of lifestyle and leisure as an important resource for meaning and identity in modern Western societies and providing the useful concept of the 'body project'; his emphasis on agency and reflexivity in the choice of which lifestyle we participate in is less helpful to understanding the social structuring of running, and as such his work plays a relatively minor role in the analysis of the field of running that follows. Foucault is particularly useful in addressing running as part of the 'healthy lifestyle', and - in the historical analysis - of connecting the rise of fitness running to the socioeconomic developments of the last half century or so. And finally, Elias plays an especially important role in the historical analysis, helping make sense of key developments in running from Victorian times until today.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

# Pursuing running with Bourdieu

### 3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I located this study within the sociological literature around sport, lifestyle and the body. Next, I turn to the research process itself. I will begin by restating the research objectives and questions, and will go on to describe and justify my approach to address these. This includes a discussion of the research strategy and design, and of the development and deployment of the methods themselves. Making these choices explicit is an important part of the research process because of the role they can play in shaping the knowledge produced by the study (Pole and Lampard, 2002). I will also reflect on how my own social position and status as an 'insider' within the field of running may have influenced my approach and the data it generated (see Stanley, 1993).

### 3.2 Research problem and questions

The problem this research addresses relates to what I assert is a lack of attention to detail in the way running has been conceived as a social practice until now. Whilst previous studies described in the literature review have described the social characteristics associated with running as a whole, social variation *within* running and the cultural meanings of different forms of the sport have remained largely unexamined. For those studying the phenomenon of mass participation running this is an important omission, because it contributes to rendering this diverse form of 'serious leisure' a grossly simplified analytical object. It obscures the significant cultural distinctions between different approaches to running (which can in fact oppose each other in key meanings and practices). It also hides substantial variations in the social makeup of different ways of participating in the sport that, I argue, are related to the ways running enables the performance of a variety of social identities.

This research project is thus an exercise in mapping a sociological *terra incognita* - the microcosm of related but distinctive social practices hidden behind the

nebulous catch-all, 'running'. It is also an attempt to understand which social factors are important in shaping this social terrain, the processes through which this occurs, and how the resulting relationships between particular social groups and different ways of doing running help to transform ways of running into ways of performing social position. My research questions are:

1. To what extent can recreational running be understood as a set of distinctive sub-practices?
2. How does social position influence the ways people engage in running?
3. Through what processes are social characteristics connected to people's choices about how they engage with running?
4. How do different ways of doing running contribute to the reproduction of different social identities?

### **3.3 Choice of research strategy and design**

It makes sense to split these research questions into two pairs, each of which appears to require a different kind of answer. Questions 1 and 2 are about identifying macro-level patterns of practice that are robust enough to extrapolate to the wider running population. This is only practically possible by generating standardised, comparable data about the backgrounds and practices of a sufficiently large and representative sample of runners that can stand for the population as a whole, and analysing this data systematically. Questions 3 and 4, on the other hand, are about meaning and experience. They are about understanding how individuals' day-to-day experiences, values, tastes, resources and opportunities help to shape their choices around running participation, and how different forms of running answer particular needs.

In order to provide the breadth of data required for the former pair of questions and the depth necessary to answer the latter, this research required a strategy that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods. Questions 1 and 2 were to be addressed primarily through a large-scale survey, and questions 3 and 4 through semi-structured interviews and (to a lesser extent) media research. Technically then, this research employs a mixed-methods strategy. Quantitative and qualitative methods are deployed *complementarily* (see Hammersley, 1996),

with each addressing a different aspect of the subject matter – the structuring of patterns of practice in the case of the quantitative methods, and the lived experience of runners in the case of the qualitative (see also Bryman, 2008).

Mixed methods research has been challenged on the grounds that qualitative and quantitative methods are based on incompatible epistemological and ontological paradigms and produce ‘kinds of information that... are often incommensurate’ (Morgan, 1998: 363; see also Mason, 1996). Here, the quantitative methods that elicit data and emphasise causality, structure and variables, are seen as incompatible with the qualitative concern for perspective, process and detail (Bryman, 1992). However, supporters of mixed methods argue that researchers should select methods for their appropriateness to each research question (as I have done here) and should be free to combine strategies whilst remaining cognisant of their differing epistemological assumptions (Bryman, 1988). Indeed, in the case of studies such as this, which aim ‘to both pronounce on patterns of cultural taste and... engage with the nuances of cultural orientations’ (Silva, Warde and Wright, 2009: 2), using a mixed methods strategy has been described as a necessity.

The research design is essentially cross-sectional in that it depicts the social space of running and the characteristics, practices and attitudes of its participants at a specific point in time. However, both the quantitative and qualitative data do make it possible to at least infer something about process and change over time. This can be done, for instance, by comparing variables around running engagement for participants at different ages<sup>4</sup>, life stages or at different points in their running career, or by engaging with interview subjects’ biographies to help make sense of their dispositions, tastes and attitudes in the present.

Below, I will describe in detail the development of my research tools and the data collection process in the sequence in which they were deployed. However,

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<sup>4</sup> Of course any differences between the typical forms of engagement of runners at different ages do not necessarily imply runners move through an arc of engagement as they age as, for instance, generational differences could be at play here. Hence any inferences about change over time can only be cautious.

before moving on to this, I want to outline aspects of the underlying social theory on which my approach to answering the research questions rested. This will provide the context that explains both the kind of data I needed to generate and how it was analysed.

### **3.4 Theorising and modelling the social world**

As I have described, inspiring and informing my approach to this research is Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 2005). I have outlined key tenets of this approach in chapter two, but here I want to draw attention to its underlying *relational* ontology. In Bourdieu's hands this meant rejecting common sense representations of the social world that are 'embedded in the very language we use, which is better suited to express things than relations' (Bourdieu, 1990a:189), and instead engaging with a reality in which elements of the social world attain meaning and coherence through their relationships with each other<sup>5</sup> within social fields structured according to specific, local principles. In other words, rather than importing *a priori* assumptions about which social categories are important in structuring the fields that make up the social world (e.g. which practices 'fit' together, or which social variables organise behaviour) patterns emerge from the data at the level of individual respondents' reported choices and preferences, revealing how individual people and practices cohere into distinctive clusters or lifestyles differentiated according to *what appears to be* a purely local logic.

I emphasise the *appearance* of local logic because a central argument of Bourdieu's theory of practice was that the apparently local, independent logic of social fields was often an illusion – a misrecognised translation into local argot of wider structural inequalities that govern the whole of social space. Actors were simply unable to perceive the ways in which local hierarchies or categories (e.g. favouring abstract versus landscape painting; or indoor sports versus adventure sports) refracted and reinforced social differences in class, gender, age or ethnicity. As Vandenberghe (1999: 35) argued, the 'structural causes that... explain and necessitate the observed phenomena' can 'escape [the]

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<sup>5</sup> In terms of how likely different practices are to be partaken of by the same individual.



consciousness' of those engaged in a given field. In this light, measuring how ways of doing running relate to each other to make up the structure of the sport's field (by defining the range of coherent positions available to actors within it) quantitatively, is vital to the Bourdieusian method. This is because aggregate data about runners' practices allows us to get behind actors' perceptions and to address overall patterns in the distribution of practices themselves. Whilst these overarching patterns may exist (at least partly) beyond the conscious awareness of individual runners, they are socially and culturally charged, enabling the performance of a range of distinctive identities through the sport.

Once coherent 'ways of running' have been identified statistically and positioned relative to one another within the field (more on how this is achieved below), we can turn to their relationship with key social variables in order to assess how the field itself might reflect wider social structures. To facilitate this, the survey tool needed to collect data on a wide range of fine-grained practices and motivations around running as well as respondents' key social characteristics. Variety and heterogeneity were key here, as loading the survey with questions addressing aspects of pre-conceived categories of practice could lead to these 'ready-made' correspondences obscuring underlying structures based on more subtle sociocultural factors (more below).

As well as this quantitative data, individual qualitative testimony remains vital to complete the Bourdieusian picture. To understand how relationships between practices emerge and what their local organising principles mean for those active in the field requires evidence from the 'point of view or position from which [individuals'] particular vision[s] of the world [are] constructed' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:107; see also Holt, 1997). The interviews, therefore, needed to explore how subjects understood the meaning of their preferred way of doing running, what dispositions it addressed, and how they came to choose it over the alternatives. They also needed to drill down into runners' biographies in order to understand how differences in social position, with their attendant variations in life experiences and resources, shaped individuals' likelihood of taking up a given form of running (i.e. field position). From this data it would also be possible to

infer something about how forms of running are connected to the performance of different social identities.

A potential problem with using a purely relational approach to the quantitative data on practices and motives is that it precludes straightforward, direct assessments of the variations in practice associated with individual social variables like gender or occupational group. As such, and following Bennett et al. (2009) as well as Bourdieu himself, as well as deploying the relational approach, I also chose to use more standard statistical techniques to focus on and quantify relationships between particular practices (or clusters of such) and key social variables. For Bourdieu himself, the most important variables governing cultural consumption were economic and cultural capital, but later researchers have highlighted the independent importance of gender, ethnicity and age here too (see Bennett et al., 2009).

So, as well as creating a new relational analysis of running practice free of *a priori* hypotheses about underlying social structuring factors, this study also attempts to test and extend Bourdieu's and others' ideas about the ways particular social variables are associated with variations in practice that hold true (translated into different cultural languages) across many fields. It seeks, in other words, to examine the extent to which social position, through the mediation of the conditioned tastes and values of the habitus<sup>6</sup>, produces inequalities in running that are analogous to those that have been identified in other fields of social space, and how running may thus be implicated in the reproduction of social inequalities that extend far beyond the sport itself.

### **3.5 Quantitative methods**

#### **3.5.1 The Big Running Survey**

The centrepiece of this study was a large-scale online survey of runners from across the UK that I called the Big Running Survey<sup>7</sup> (BRS). It consisted of over one

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<sup>6</sup> Of course habitus is not the only factor at work here, and its effects need disentangling from those of, for instance, access to financial resources or free time.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix for the complete questionnaire.

hundred questions covering a wide range of aspects of engagement in the sport, including:

- Motivations for running;
- Engagement in specific organised forms of the sport (e.g. track athletics, fell-running);
- Engagement in micro-practices around running (e.g. accessing coaching, running alone or with friends, using running social media);
- Amount of time spent running and racing, and financial spend on the sport;
- The history of respondents' involvement in running.

It also collected data about runners' wider backgrounds and attitudes:

- Social variables: Gender, age, ethnicity, education, income, occupation, family structure;
- Factors perceived as barriers to engagement in running;
- Self-appraisals in terms of body image and running talent.

As discussed above, the objective of generating this data was to construct an overall picture of running practice in the UK that would enable ways of doing running – clusters of practices and orientations – to be identified, and any relationships with underlying social factors to be discerned. A survey is a powerful tool in this regard, providing a systematic view of a large number of runners that is amenable to quantitative analysis (see Groves et al. 2004: 4), and, provided the sample is sufficiently representative and the questions relatively unambiguous (see Finke, 1995), can provide robust, generalisable findings about the 'who' and the 'what' of running in the population under study (Gillham, 2008: 2). Below I outline how I approached designing and disseminating the survey, and the methods I used to analyse the data it produced.

### **3.5.2 Developing questions**

Simmons (2006: 86) cautions that 'the success of a survey will depend on the questions that are asked', and indeed, everything from their phrasing to the nature of the underlying concept being probed needs to be considered carefully.

But almost as important as the design of the questions, the ways respondents are permitted to respond need to be given thought too; the format of each item in the survey – each question and means of answering it - has ramifications for the data it produces. The challenges associated with designing questions for the BRS varied depending on the type of data they sought to elicit. As such, I will now unpack and describe key issues around each of the four main types of variable generated: social attributes, practices, motivations, and self-descriptors around running bodies.

### **3.5.3 Social variables**

Designing questions to elicit data about social variables such as gender, age, occupational class and ethnicity is well-trodden territory with plenty of existing research to draw on, official categories to employ and – in some cases – relatively unambiguous types of response. Utilising response categories and questions from existing research is not only helpful because it saves reinventing the wheel, it also facilitates comparison between the BRS data and other, larger datasets. In particular, Sport England’s Active People Survey (APS) proved a useful point of reference here. This survey provides a snapshot of sporting practice across England each year, with a huge sample of well over 150,000 people. By collecting data in some of the same categories as were used in the APS it was possible to check how closely my sample reflected the social picture of running generated by the much larger-scale APS, and enabled me to interpret how running practices fitted into and reflected a broader picture of sporting lifestyles more generally. The APS, in turn, draws on the government’s National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) (see Office for National Statistics, 2018a) to classify occupations and uses an adapted version of the ethnicity categories from the same source. As such, I imported the classificatory schemes and questions from the APS for these variables.

Comparison between my data and the APS was not possible for measures of education, and personal and household income because the published APS data has had these variables removed. So, in the case of the two income variables, I turned instead to government statistics that provided personal income by percentile for the year of the BRS survey (see UK government website, 2018),

and household income by decile (see Office for National Statistics, 2018b). Using these figures, I identified income bands that struck a compromise between achieving a fairly consistent range of incomes in each band and an even number of people across the categories. For education, because I was interested in operationalising this variable as a measure of established cultural capital, I focused on academic rather than vocational qualifications. I based the response categories on the UK NVQ equivalent scale (see Connelly, Gayle and Lambert, 2016), but adapted this slightly because of the expectation (as a result of previous studies of running, see above) that graduates would be overrepresented in the sample. As such, I split the highest educational level (NVQ level 5) into two so that those with a postgraduate degree could be distinguished from those who only possessed a first degree. Questions on social variables were included at the end of the survey to reduce survey non-response/abandonment rates (see Savino, 2010).

#### **3.5.4 Practices and motivations**

Collecting data relating to the different behaviours runners engage in was vital to building a picture of the set of coherent ways of doing running (clusters of practices) within the space of running lifestyles. This data, when complemented with that relating to respondents' reasons for running, helped to define clusters of practices and motives, as well as suggesting something about the wider values and preoccupations that may drive running participation for different groups. In order to generate as complete a picture as possible it was imperative that the options presented for respondents to choose from represented a heterogeneous spread of possible practices and motivations, devoid as far as possible of obvious existing relationships (see Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010 for a detailed exposition of this approach). If the practices or motives have pre-existing relationships because they are tied together based on things like rules, institutions or infrastructure, or if they are semantically too similar, it will be these relationships that the statistical analysis will reveal, and not those relating to underlying structuring factors linked to social position and habitus.

With this in mind, I developed a wide range of questions addressing an array of potential motivations and granular practices – from socialising with fellow

runners and reading books about running to volunteering at running events and representing a club. I also asked which institutional forms of running respondents had taken part in over the previous 12 months. This focused specifically on the kinds of races they had been involved in, as whilst training for running may not vary hugely across all forms of the sport, races of different kinds have different institutions, histories, infrastructures and meanings and thus offer a powerful way for runners to perform distinctive running identities. Having data at these two levels – granular practices and engagement with wider, institutionally underpinned forms of running – I was able to choose the most appropriate variables for each form of analysis, whether relational or more standard statistics, to focus on the connections between practices or forms and key social variables.

Respondents were offered three response options for each question distinguishing between high, moderate and no importance/regularity<sup>8</sup>. This system opened the door to a degree of ambiguity, as the meaning of and threshold between the response options used - 'regular' and 'occasional' (practices) – or 'very important' and 'quite important' (motives) - were open to interpretation. Furthermore, there was also an issue with the meaning of these terms - particularly around practices - shifting from one context to the next. For instance, 'regularly' using a GPS watch might mean using it for every run, whereas visiting a sports masseur 'regularly' might mean once per month. However, these three options provided a rough way to distinguish between habitual practices/priority motivations and occasional practices/secondary motivations, so I chose to include this to provide flexibility in the analysis phase. 'Moderate' and 'high' responses could, of course, be combined to generate a simple binary variable differentiating between those who do and do not engage in a practice or possess a particular motivation at all.

Selecting which practices and motives to include in the survey was one of the ways in which my own personal experiences, biases and worldview – my *positionality* (see Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) - will have influenced the data produced. Being a committed runner with a competitive orientation – an

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<sup>8</sup> See questionnaire in appendix for specific wording.

insider, but a *particular kind* of insider – had certain advantages but also disadvantages in this process. Summarising Kurslow (2003), insiders can bring to bear a deep understanding of the subject under study and the meanings it has to participants, however, they are at risk of being insufficiently detached from the subject matter and may be more likely to follow their preconceptions rather than the data. So, whilst I was familiar with the kinds of things that ‘go on’ in running (at least in the forms I have participated in), this could have led me to take things for granted, or to privilege or over-emphasise aspects of running I was familiar with. The issue of positionality also extends to my location in wider social space as a white, middle-class man, in his late 30s<sup>9</sup>. This again, could have led me to prioritise practices closer to my own experiences and preoccupations, whilst those of others, for example teenage female joggers, might have been missed, devalued or unintentionally caricatured. To counter issues around positionality I discussed my survey with as many runners as I could whilst developing the questions. I also read books, websites and magazines aimed at groups such as female runners, those running to lose weight, people who run as a way of coping with mental health problems, and those involved in types of running I was less familiar with, such as adventure and obstacle course racing. Finally, I piloted the survey with a diverse group of around 50 runners and asked them for feedback on whether they felt they had had the opportunity to describe the important elements of their running practice and motivation during the survey. Based on this feedback I revised several questions and included additional options to ensure respondents were able to provide as full a picture of their running practice as possible.

### **3.5.5 Runners’ bodies**

The survey also included a small number of self-description questions, primarily centred on issues around runners’ perceptions of their bodies. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with their bodies, how closely they felt their bodies matched up to a ‘running ideal’, and their running ‘talent’ on a seven-point ranking scale (see Simmons, 2006: 93). They were also asked to select which of a list of physical descriptors they felt best described their own bodies.

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<sup>9</sup> At the time of data collection.

These questions were aimed at providing data to enable the exploration of the relationship between running practice, forms of physical capital and body image. They were included in the light of popular and academic writing that has drawn attention to the relationship between running and both the production of valued body shapes and body dissatisfaction, including eating disorders (e.g. Daniloff, 2012; Abbas, 2004; Howard, 1989; Yates., Leehey and Shisslak, 1983).

### **3.5.6 Survey delivery**

The survey was delivered online. It was created using Google Forms and embedded in a purpose built website ([www.bigrunningsurvey.co.uk](http://www.bigrunningsurvey.co.uk)) which also included pages explaining my background and the broad goals of the research. Survey responses were automatically piped into an online database that could be exported into my statistical software, which included both SPSS and the R statistical programming environment.

My choice of online survey delivery offered a number of advantages over paper alternatives. From the point of view of usability, it had an adaptive design in which questions could be omitted if previous answers rendered them irrelevant (see Early, Mankoff and Fienberg, 2017). It was also easy to access (via a simple link) and could be completed at leisure from any internet-connected device. It was free to produce, and could be distributed instantaneously to a national target population without cost via email. This allowed me to quickly reach running clubs, groups and media across the country. Its web-based format also enabled the link to be passed quickly between people, and facilitated engagement and sharing via social media, websites and discussion groups. The lack of need for personal contact in administering the survey also afforded a high level of anonymity, reducing the risk of social desirability bias (see Robson, 2011). And finally, the automatic storage of the data meant it was instantly available for analysis without the need for any manual data entry.

A potential problem with online approaches comes in the form of sampling bias, particularly if some subgroups within the target population have lower levels of internet access or willingness to participate online. In the recent past this has been cited as a particular risk when studying older and socially disadvantaged



groups, who have lower levels of internet access (see Reisdorf, 2011; Robson, 2011). However, the latest data suggests that internet access and competence are no longer as unevenly distributed as they once were. Amongst the younger adults who make up much of my sample, internet access is close to universal: Office for National Statistics (2018c) figures suggest that in 2017 99% of people aged 16-34 are recent internet users compared to 97% of 35-54 year olds and 90% of those aged 55-64. Recent internet use for even the traditionally low usage group of 65-74 year olds went from 53% in 2011 to 78% six years later. Whilst it is true that people older than 75 do remain significantly less likely to be recent internet users (52%) this age group only represents a very small part of the running population according to the Active People Survey, so the effects on my data would be small.

There is evidence that online surveys can suffer from lower overall response rates than some traditional approaches (see Niero, 2014), which raises the risk of obtaining a smaller sample size through the use of this medium. However, I considered this more than mitigated by the hugely increased volume of invitations that can be sent to potential respondents due to the elimination of production and distribution costs. A more intractable problem though, is that along with lower overall response rates, there is evidence that in spite of the near ubiquity of internet access, online survey response rates often favour particular groups, especially the young and well educated (Diaz, 2012). This needed to be borne in mind in the interpretation of results, although for the analytical purposes of this study complete representativeness was not necessary (see below). Overall, given the resources at my disposal, my existing knowledge of the technology and the significant advantages of an online approach outlined above, I decided the potential benefits of this approach outweighed its weaknesses.

### **3.5.7 Pilot**

Pilots or pretests are 'small scale rehearsals of the data collection conducted before the main survey. The purpose of a pretest is to evaluate the survey instrument as well as the data collection and respondent selection procedures'

(Groves et al. 2004: 247). The pilot for the BRS took place a month before the main survey was scheduled to begin. Respondents were identified using a snowball sampling approach, with personal contacts asked to complete the survey and to recommend other possible respondents. To mitigate the possible bias towards runners with a similar orientation to me (because my contacts included a large number of similar competitive, male runners) I also asked non-running friends to suggest people they knew who ran – thus breaking free of my own extended running network – and deliberately sought out acquaintances I believed had different running orientations to my own.

In the end, the pilot sample reached 48 respondents. As well as completing the survey, each was asked to provide feedback in terms of how clear the questions were, whether they felt able to express their own running practices and motivations clearly, and whether they felt any questions should be added, removed or altered. This information, along with the results of an exploratory analysis of the data collected, fed into a revision process which resulted in several changes being made to the survey.

### **3.5.8 Sampling and dissemination**

As I have already mentioned, one of the biggest advantages of an online survey is its speed and resource efficiency with regards to dissemination (also see de Leeuw, 2012). However, it must be acknowledged that the communicative facility of this kind of instrument can be a double-edged sword. This is because it is easy for the researcher to lose control of the sampling process as the survey is proactively shared by individuals and groups online. The risk here is that the sample becomes biased to reflect the characteristics of the networks through which the survey is shared rather than the wider target population. For instance, if it is enthusiastically passed around a group that share a particular social characteristic such as gender or age this might result in this characteristic becoming over-represented in the sample. So, to an extent there is a trade-off between sample size (which grows every time the survey is shared) and control over the risk of sampling bias. However, because of the nature of my research questions and the analytical tools I used to explore them, strict representativeness (of the running population as a whole) was less important

than obtaining good sized samples from different regions within the field – different ‘ways of doing running’ - that could be compared in terms of practical, motivational and social characteristics. It was not, after all, an aim of this research to provide an accurate demographic breakdown of running (for example, how many people practice each form), but rather to paint a schematic picture of the culturally distinctive ways of doing running, and to compare their *relative* appeal to different groups. Having a smaller proportion of men in the sample than one would expect based on the running population as a whole, does not, for example, prevent an analysis of which forms of running are especially appealing to men; having more fell-runners than is representative does not prevent an analysis of how fell-runners’ motivations compare to practitioners of other forms. So, a kind of *sufficient* representativeness was necessary, in that the data needed to include good sized samples from all of the major communities of practice/orientations to running identified within the field, but strict representativeness was not required. I will address the issues I faced in relation to generating the sample below, but first I will outline the methods I used to disseminate the survey:

- The survey link was sent to friends and acquaintances who I knew to be runners or to know runners, asking them to complete the survey or to pass it on to others;
- I contacted running clubs and groups by email (addresses researched online) asking them to pass the survey details on to members via postings on club websites and social media or by email.
- I contacted organising bodies and commercial race organisers asking them to disseminate the survey to their members/customers via their social media accounts;
- I contacted running media, including magazines, social media channels, websites and bloggers to ask for social media mentions and coverage;
- I set up a Twitter account to communicate with influential Twitter users. This elicited numerous retweets that contributed significantly to the sample size.

All these methods bore fruit, with contacting running clubs and groups proving particularly successful, along with social media promotion. The BRS received coverage in at least two print running magazines, as well as a number of blogs and was mentioned on dozens of running club Facebook pages. As a result, the sample eventually consisted of 2,637 usable responses.

As mentioned above, the proactive sharing of the survey by my respondents was extremely welcome in terms of extending its reach, but appears to have contributed somewhat to the 'lumpiness' of the data produced. For example, if an influential social media user who specialised in one particular form of running or audience was especially successful in promoting the survey, this could generate a large amount of data from a particular, narrow social category. This may help explain the high percentage of female runners in the data (60%, when according to the APS survey women make up about 44% of runners). In this case a particularly successful tweet from *Women's Running* magazine resulted in a cascade of retweets and a very high level of response from mostly female runners. However, quantifying the impact of this particular event – or of all social media sharing effects - on the makeup of the sample is not easy, not just because of a lack of useful data, but also because we would need to disentangle it from the widely reported finding that women appear more likely to respond to online surveys than men anyway (see Smith, 2008).

As I have explained, absolute representativeness was less important than obtaining sufficient depth of coverage for as many different ways of doing running as possible. In this regard there was a risk that whilst the survey was effective at reaching committed club runners and those with enough engagement to follow running groups on social media or read running magazines, the least engaged runners may have been missed. Their lack of institutional, social or media engagement makes it hard to think of an effective means of specifically targeting this kind of runner, but fortunately the data suggests a reasonable number *were* picked up during the survey. And it is in the ability of social media sharing to reach into the nooks and crannies of social space that this approach finds another justification in this kind of research. Whilst socially disengaged runners may not attend a club or follow running on

social media, they may, amongst their social media or 'offline' friends, know someone who does. If more engaged runners shared the survey with less engaged friends, there was a chance they would participate. When hundreds of people share the survey, it is likely that many of even the least engaged runners (at least those who use social media) will become aware of it. And this appears to have been the case: 26% of the sample ran twice per week or less, almost 9% of the sample never participated in races, and well over 100 runners fell into both of these categories.

Turning to ethnicity, 'white British' respondents represented 90% of the sample. Taking in 'other white' identities, this proportion increases to 97%. This compares with 82% and 87% in the UK general population. In this, the BRS data largely reflects the lower levels of participation in running by non-white groups picked up in the larger APS survey. However, the BRS data paints an even more extreme picture than that suggested by the APS, suggesting non-white respondents may be underrepresented in my data. Low survey response rates for non-white populations is, unfortunately, a problem that has been identified across many contexts (see Sheldon et al. 2007; Feskens et al. 2007). The very low number of non-white respondents (total 68, or 2.6% after 'other' ethnicity is discounted) made it difficult to say a great deal about the role of ethnicity within running. In order to explore this further, and given the relatively low numbers of non-white runners as a whole, a significantly larger or more targeted dataset would be required. This problem was also encountered by the much better resourced researchers working on the *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion* project (see Bennett et al. 2009). Here ethnic boost samples were collected to redress the balance. Unfortunately, I could think of no practical way of achieving this myself, so whilst acknowledging the importance of the issue of the underrepresentation of non-white people in running, I have kept fine-grained discussions of ethnicity in the findings that follow quite limited.

Overall, whilst there is some evidence of sample bias in the data, this is certainly not fatal to my analysis, and in fact the broad picture it paints fits quite closely with that of the much larger APS survey on sporting engagement (see chapter 5 for more details). Furthermore, good sized sub-samples from various groups

within running were collected, facilitating the type of analysis I wanted to undertake. And whilst the dissemination strategy may have produced somewhat 'lumpy' data, relative to realistic alternatives it showed a number of significant benefits. Obviously one of these was that the sample was large and disparate, ensuring all – or something like all – types of runner were reached to a reasonable extent. But also, dissemination through proxies – those mostly unknown benefactors who shared the survey with others – unshackled the data collection from the influence of my own personal biases and potentially homogeneous networks.

### **3.5.9 Boost sample: Orienteers**

Towards the end of the data collection period I noticed that a number of respondents had commented that they had been unable to select 'orienteering' as a form of running they participated in. I wanted to correct this omission, so sent a revised survey with this option included to a number of orienteering organisations and media. This enabled me to include around 300 orienteers in the sample. This provided a useful point of reference, but the new data was not fully comparable with that collected during the main phase of the data collection. This was because those who responded to the survey *before* it included orienteering and who participated primarily in other forms of running were unable to indicate any occasional involvement in orienteering too. If they had been able to do so this may have drawn the two groups (orienteers and non-orienteers) closer together in terms of their social profile, and affected the levels of correspondence between orienteering and other practices. As it turned out, the social profile of orienteering that emerged from this data was so distinctive that it is inconceivable that it can be put down purely to not factoring in the social characteristics of more casual orienteers. And indeed, interview data supported what the survey data suggested – that orienteering was dominated by highly educated, older males. However, this difference in sampling had to be borne in mind in terms of how the data was used and the conclusions it could support.

### 3.5.10 Analysis

Before embarking on the analysis, it was necessary to clean, dress and recode the raw data from the BRS in various ways so that it was amenable to all of the techniques I wanted to employ and to enable direct comparability with the APS data. This included coding respondents' occupation into NS-SEC categories (see Office for National Statistics, 2018a) by taking account of answers to questions on job description, current employment status and work responsibilities; coding text responses given as 'other' in multiple choice questions such as other sporting activities, barriers to running or ethnic group; recoding motivation and practice responses to identify *strong* motivation and *regular* participation as opposed to none/never or moderate/occasional, in order to create binary categorical data amenable to the multivariate analysis technique described below; recoding some ordinal and scale variables such as running frequency, spend and years running into categorical variables, again for compatibility with my chosen statistical methods. Once this was done, I imported the data into the SPSS statistical package, which I used for the bulk of the data analysis (I also used R in some instances), although I occasionally imported descriptive statistics or raw data into Microsoft Excel and Tableau when these packages provided superior facilities for generating graphs and charts.

Following the example set by Bourdieu and his successors (e.g. Bennett et al. 2009), the central statistical technique used in this research was Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). This technique takes as input the participation/motivation profiles of my survey respondents, and identifies which practices and motives tend to go together (i.e. be most likely to correspond in the same individual) and which are rarely found together. The real beauty of this technique is that part of its output is a set of two-dimensional 'maps' that depict relationships between practices in terms of the underlying factors that structure variation in practice (see Vandenberghe, 1999; Hardy, 2012). Practices that sit close together on such maps are often engaged in by the same people; those far apart rarely go together. The axes of these maps reflect the underlying structuring dimensions of the field and are usually depicted in order of importance. So, a map showing dimensions one and two depicts the two most

important ways in which practices are differentiated, and one showing dimensions three and four depicts the two next most powerful factors. By looking at which practices tend to be found close to one another on these maps it is possible to identify clusters of practice – or styles of running.

For variables to be included in the Multiple Correspondence Analysis, as well as it being a requisite that they were categorical in nature, they also needed to be ‘meaningful and relevant’ (Bennett et al. 2009: 45) and heterogeneous in terms of their referents (see Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010 for a technical overview). As I mentioned earlier, these parameters helped shape the choice of questions included in the BRS, but the initial analysis also offered an opportunity to weed out any heavily correlated variables that seemed substantively similar enough in meaning to warrant exclusion from the MCA. There was a significant subjective element in this process. For instance, I decided to exclude the variable ‘helped organise a club or race’ because it seemed too closely related to ‘been in charge of a running a club or race’, both statistically and substantively. Another example was around the types of race respondents had taken part in. Factor analysis demonstrated that these fell into five clusters: road races, track races, obstacle races and ‘extreme’ (fell, ultra) races, and non-racers. Therefore, to avoid the MCA plots being dominated by accounting for the variance between these clusters I chose a small number of representative forms to include in the analysis.

The result of this process was a set of 37 categorical practice and motivation variables. I imported these into the R statistical package, because it provided both greater flexibility in terms of plot aesthetics and a much faster processing speed than SPSS, which was useful because of the large amount of data being analysed. I next used R (along with its FactomineR and GGPlot2 packages) to conduct the multiple correspondence analysis, and to produce plots depicting the field of running along four distinctive axes. I excluded from each plot any practices or motives that were weakly related to the displayed axes to reduce clutter and focus attention on the most structurally important variables in each dimension. Next, supplemental variables<sup>10</sup> were constructed from categorical

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<sup>10</sup> Variables that are not included in the analysis to create the dimensions of the MCA charts, but are included on the charts in positions defined by their relationship to these dimensions.



social variables (for instance, runners aged under 40 or of occupational class 5-8) and included in the MCA. This helped reveal the relationships between key social variables and the most important structuring factors (defined by the MCA axes) within the sport.

MCA also allows for the production of 'clouds of individuals' (available in the appendix B). Plotted on the same axes as for the maps of practices, this shows the location of every survey respondent in the space they define. Because my interviewees subsequently completed the survey, I could identify a direct link between the qualitative interview data and the maps of practices. Interviewees could be located at a specific position on each map. The relationship between my quantitative and qualitative data can thus be understood as analogous to that between a map of a tract of land, which depicts in broad terms its different regions, their relative proximity to one another and their distinctive characteristics, and a set of travellers' tales, that provide first-hand accounts of how and why individuals found their ways to specific, identifiable locations on the map.

This process produced the overall maps of the field of running prescribed as a key part of Bourdieusian research (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) as well as a strong connection to the qualitative data. But I also wanted to dig deeper into the specific roles of particular social variables (including gender, age, and forms of capital) that other researchers have reported as important factors structuring social space, in order to assess their relevance to running. For this, more standard descriptive techniques were also deployed. In keeping with the aesthetic and conceptual approach of the MCAs I decided to plot forms, practices and motives onto 2-dimensional geometric spaces defined by pairs of variables – gender ratio and mean age in one case, economic and cultural capital (income and education) in another. This, along with other descriptive techniques, enabled me to isolate variations in ways of doing running associated with particular social variables that aided in the interpretation of the social structure of running beyond what was depicted in the more sophisticated and complex MCA plots.

## 3.6 Qualitative methods

### 3.6.1 Interviews

Having used the quantitative data to generate a map of the sociocultural terrain of running I next turned to qualitative methods to help explore variations in what these practices actually meant to participants. These meanings provided insights into what Bourdieu called the *cultural orientations* of practitioners. Such orientations – values, tastes, attitudes – are of course, aspects of the habitus, the set of habitual ways of being and seeing that individuals internalise as a result of life experiences (see Maton, 2012). The interviews also provided an opportunity to illuminate these experiences in individual cases by exploring respondents' biographical narratives around their engagement with running. As such, the interviews provided humanised insights – thoughts, feelings and stories – to bring colour and meaning to the quantitative data. As mentioned above, because interviewees also completed the survey (post-interview) it was possible to pinpoint their locations within the quantitative maps and charts, providing examples of what it is like to occupy a specific location within the field of running (see maps in section 5.5.6).

Interviews offer a 'flexible and adaptable way of [opening a] virtually unique window... on what lies behind our actions' (Robinson, 2011: 280). They offer an opportunity to collect rich and deep data that could never be practically elicited through a questionnaire, and because they are conducted in-person, have the added benefit of flexibility: The researcher can adapt their tone, encourage more information or alter their questions over the course of the interview to maximise the value of the interview. Unlike a questionnaire, which by design generates the same kind of data each time<sup>11</sup>, every interview 'is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 4).

That said, interviews are rarely fully freeform conversations. An underlying structure is normally applied to ensure each interview explores key areas

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<sup>11</sup> The exception being skipped/triggered questions, although these still sit within a pre-defined framework.

properly and does not wander too far from the topic. I chose to use a semi-structured approach for my interviews in which 'the interviewer asks major questions in the same way, but is free to alter their sequence and to probe for more information' (Fielding and Thomas, 2006: 124). This provided a framework (available in the appendix) to keep interviews on track, ensured important comparisons could be drawn between respondents' testimony, and allowed the flexibility to explore respondents' passions, priorities and experiences as they emerged. This was particularly important because my interviewees were selected for their diversity in terms of running practice, so a topic that was important to one might be irrelevant to another.

Before embarking on the main semi-structured part of the interview I asked an initial 'generative question' (Riemann and Schutze, 1987) designed to elicit an extended account of the interviewee's biography as a runner. This first part of the interview conformed to a narrative approach, allowing each participant the freedom to describe the history of their life as a runner in ways that emphasised aspects or events they regarded as most important to their story rather than focusing on my pre-conceived priorities. This approach was used because of the important role social background and experiences play in the Bourdieusian model of social practice. Understanding the formative or meaningful experiences of my respondents provided valuable data to help make the connection between social position, dispositions and choices around running practice. As such, during this part of the interview I encouraged the respondent to elaborate or expand but avoided asking questions that could steer the discussion or place undue emphasis on particular events or themes.

### **3.6.2 Questions and structure**

As mentioned above, the interviews began with a 'generative question' designed to elicit a prolonged biographical response that covered the respondent's earliest relevant (as they saw it) running related memories through to the present day. I decided to place this narrative question first because this avoided priming the respondent with ideas about what kinds of topics I was interested in or thought were important. By allowing respondents as much liberty as possible to shape

their testimony as they saw fit there was more chance that the things they chose to describe were their own priorities rather than reflections of my own.

Next came a series of semi-structured sections addressing various aspects of taste, practice, experiences and attitudes. Each section contained a small number of set questions, but left room for asking additional questions and probing for more information or examples where necessary. I included a list of suggestions of prompts and probes on my personal interview guide to aid this process (see Fielding and Thomas, 2006). If a previous answer rendered a set question superfluous it would be skipped (see Bryman, 2008). After the semi-structured sections, time was allocated to explore some of the themes that had arisen during the interview in more depth and to provide the respondent with an opportunity to discuss other issues they felt were important but had not talked about previously.

In devising the set questions, I tried as much as possible to avoid framing them in ways that reflected my own experiences and priorities around running or made assumptions about respondents' ways of understanding their participation (see Finlay and Gough, 2003). The topics I covered were influenced by my theoretical standpoint, which required an exploration of practices (lifestyle); early/introductory experiences (potentially generative of the habitus); the role of access to resources and personal circumstances (capital); and tastes, attitudes and perceptions (manifestations of mental schema). Some questions, particularly around taste and practice were sharpened after an initial analysis of the quantitative survey data, which pointed towards certain oppositions between different and distinctive ways of doing running. Wider reading and discussion also helped suggest salient issues in wider running culture that could be addressed in the interviews. Largely though, the questions and style of the interviews were open and designed to provide as much scope for interviewees to express their own priorities, thoughts and feelings as possible, and to frame their responses themselves (see Robson, 2011). As such, the quantitative insights and wider research were more useful for probing, contextualising and exploring these broad responses than in the construction of the framework of set questions.

### **3.6.3 Pilot/first interviews**

The first two interviews I conducted doubled as a kind of live pilot. The responses were used in the final analysis, but additional feedback was elicited both from the interviewees around the interview process and content, and from my supervisors, who saw copies of the interview transcripts. This process resulted in tweaks to some of the questions and was useful in refining my probing and active listening techniques and to ensure important issues were fully explored. In particular, I learnt to be more flexible in my questioning strategy so that my interviewees had greater opportunity to discuss the topics that mattered to them in detail. In my initial interviews I had sometimes failed to respond to cues from the interviewees that, through probing, could have elicited useful material about their motivations and experiences. After the initial interviews, and taking onboard the lessons I had learnt through them, subsequent interviews retained a consistent approach throughout the data collection.

### **3.6.4 Interview sampling strategy**

Having used the MCA maps to identify key structural features of the field of running I was able to define broad 'types' of runner that I wanted to interview in order to obtain testimony from respondents with a good spread of orientations to the sport. This meant finding people with different combinations of the following characteristics:

- High or low engagement with running
- Competitive versus self-care priorities
- Goal versus intrinsic pleasure-oriented priorities
- Social versus individual priorities

This framework provided a guide to the kinds of people I needed to recruit as interviewees, but as I will explain, practical considerations and opportunities played a powerful role in shaping the makeup of the final sample too.

In order to identify potential interviewees, I initially asked well-connected runners that I knew to ask around their own running networks for volunteers. I obtained five interviews this way, but these were all from highly engaged and

competitive runners from my contacts' clubs. In order to break free of these homogenous networks I started asking non-running friends and colleagues if they knew anyone who ran, explicitly saying I was not necessarily looking for serious runners, but anyone who ran to any degree. This helped me collect less committed and competitive runners from geographical locations spread across the country. Because I live in Cambridge, far from any hills or mountains, I found it hard to identify regular fell-runners, although this group made up an important and distinctive part of my survey sample. To manage this problem, I contacted the Fell Runners Association, who kindly put up a notice in one of their online forums. Through this I was contacted by two fell-runners, one male and one female, who agreed to be interviewed. I used a similar process to obtain an interview with an orienteer, although this was facilitated by an orienteering club. Finally, I obtained two interviews from people who had contacted me during the survey phase, who had perspectives that I felt were not represented amongst the other respondents.

In total I conducted 21 interviews. These represented a wide range of the orientations to running suggested by the MCA, although for a number of reasons the spread across the field was not even. First, as I have mentioned, highly engaged runners were over-represented because they were not only more likely to volunteer for the survey, but also more likely to be 'connected' to other runners who might have passed on my request for interviewees. Secondly, there was no way of knowing with certainty prior to an interview where a person would be located in the field. Only over the course of the interview would this become clear, so even my best efforts to identify people from specific areas of the field could only be approximate. Thirdly, as mentioned above, my geographical location presented some issues finding and conducting interviews with fell-runners. As a result, my choice of interviewees here was quite limited. Although I travelled extensively to meet interviewees from locations including London, East Sussex, Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, Shropshire and Lincolnshire, I conducted two interviews, with runners from Wales and North Yorkshire, using Skype because of the travel time involved not fitting with my other work and family commitments (more on this below). Finally, individually-oriented,

uncommitted runners who were not engaged with a club were difficult to recruit because of their low engagement and externality to identifiable networks of other runners. However, even with these reservations, the sample I achieved had considerable variety in terms of orientation – motivations, practices – and social variables, and provided a range of perspectives on the sport. The respondents are summarised in table 1, overleaf.

As table 1 shows, the sample included runners aged between 19 and 60, with the majority in their 30s or 40s, which broadly reflects the social profile of running suggested by the APS. Eleven out of 21 were female, and their occupations could almost all be categorised as middle-class, again reflecting the social makeup of running suggested by other studies.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Primary occupation	Running Orientation***
Bradley	Male	39	Engineer	Committed, competitive individualist
Clara	Female	40	Police officer	Self-care oriented socialiser
Robert	Male	23	Student	Committed competitor
Jane	Female	43	Medical rep	Committed, experiences, socialiser
Jacqui	Female	21	Student	Committed, competitive individualist
Emma	Female	39	Nurse	Committed runner
Paul	Male	60	Retired doctor	Committed competitor
Katie	Female	37	Marketing Mgr.	Goal oriented self-care runner
Kerry	Female	33	Editor	Committed, self-care & experiences
Dan	Male	21	Journalist	Low commitment
Colin	Male	52	Managing director	Committed, competitive individualist
Jennifer	Female	37	Teacher	Low commitment, self-care runner
Tina	Female	38	IT Manager	Low commitment, self-care runner
Ryan	Male	19	Student	Committed, competitive individualist
Mark*	Male	33	Software engineer	Low commitment, social runner
Marie*	Female	33	Software engineer	Competitive, social runner
Mike	Male	53	Firefighter	Intrinsic enjoyer
Gwen	Female	42	Retired actuary	Committed, competitive individualist
Olivia	Female	48	Writer	Committed self-care runner
Clive**	Male	42	Student	**
Max**	Male	55	Editor	**
SUMMARY	Female	mean		
	=	=		
	55%	38.3		

Table 1: Summary of interview respondents and their backgrounds.

\* Marie and Mark lived together.

\*\* Did not complete survey, so not located on individual plots (in appendix).

\*\*\* Running orientation is illustrative, based on distinctive positions in MCA clouds explored in detail in chapter 5 (also see appendix for plots of individuals' positions on MCA plots).



### 3.6.5 Conducting the interviews

As I have mentioned, most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face with all but one of these taking place at the subject's home, with the exception being Mike's interview, which took place in a meeting room at my university. Two other interviews (Olivia, Gwen) were conducted using Skype. These variations are important to consider, because interview location can play a role in generating the power dynamic between researcher and subject, and can influence the data that is produced (see Herzog, 2005). An interview that takes place at the subject's home, for instance, shifts power towards the subject, who, as the host, is on 'home turf', whilst the interviewer is the guest; an interview at a university department may, on the other hand, feel comparatively unfamiliar and clinical to the subject. However, given the relatively uncontroversial and non-sensitive nature of the subject matter involved (see Adler and Adler, 2002:528) I decided to be flexible on interview location and medium to suit the subject if this was important to them. In this I follow Seidman (1991) in acknowledging that as an interviewer I was the 'taker' and the subject the 'giver', so should be willing to adapt to their preferences when necessary.

Skype was used to facilitate interviews when travel distances were impractical because of work and family commitments. In both cases its use was suggested by the interviewee. Using Skype confers great logistical advantages (see Deakin and Wakefield, 2014), and may also provide a degree of comfort and security for some subjects who do not wish to invite a stranger into their home when they are alone. This may be particularly true in the case of female subjects being interviewed by male researchers. Whilst some useful information is lost in the Skype interviews, particularly contextual clues about the subject's home and local environment and some body language, it has been argued that video interviews provide a good surrogate for their face-to-face counterparts, offering synchronous interaction with reduced loss of the visual and interpersonal aspects of communication associated with, for instance, telephone interviewing (see Hanna, 2012). Some researchers have argued that building rapport is more difficult without co-presence (e.g. Hay-Gibson, 2009), but I certainly did not find this to be the case, with the Skype conversations proving some of the most

fruitful, open and longest of my interviews. This may be explicable in terms of my Skype interviewees' personalities, which were confident and warm. As Deakin and Wakefield (2014: 610) suggest, rapport building on Skype appears only to be a problem when subjects are reserved or unresponsive<sup>12</sup>. In my limited experience I found that active listening was particularly important in the Skype interviews – nodding, smiling and portraying complete attention helped overcome any distancing effects due to the technological mediation. I also found that the video provided useful information on body language and even some unexpected contextual clues about the respondent's home and family life.

At the start of each interview I provided the subject with a consent form and an interview fact sheet, broadly explaining what the interview was about, who I was, and what would happen to the information they provided. I used a Dictaphone, which I informed the interviewee about before it was switched on. We would normally chat for a few minutes before starting the interview, which provided an excellent opportunity to build rapport. I was pleased by how easy I found this, almost certainly facilitated by the interview topic, which was something respondents were usually enthusiastic to talk about.

During conversations prior to the start of the interview, subjects often asked me whether I was a runner and about my running background. I was careful not to give too much away here, as this could have influenced assumptions about what I wanted to hear, or what I might think about their running choices, motivations and achievements. I needed to remain circumspect in this regard throughout the interview because the 'interviewer is actively implicated in the production of interview material' (Finlay and Gough, 2003: 131), and an awareness of my (competitive, committed) orientation to running may have influenced how subjects described their own involvement in the sport or directed the conversation in particular ways.

Of course, other aspects of my social position were harder to disguise, such as my gender, age, ethnicity and (as a PhD researcher) educational background. Of these I perceived my gender to be the most likely to have influenced the

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<sup>12</sup> Although this could be seen as something of a circular argument!

interview data. This was especially the case in interviews with women when addressing issues around body image, particularly with more competitively oriented female runners. Here I sometimes sensed reticence to talk in any detail about how these women felt about the way their bodies looked and habits around eating and weighing themselves. Men, on the other hand, were much more open on this subject. Possibly this was because competitive women in particular resist any implication that they might be running for aesthetic purposes as a kind of boundary work, maintaining their distinctive status relative to the majority of female runners who are less competitive and more focused on managing weight and appearance than the majority of men (see findings section). However, it is possible that it was not simply respondent gender, but also the fact that they were being interviewed by a man that played a role here. This may have made some women less willing to talk about their bodies than they would have been had they been interviewed by a woman. In these cases I did not pursue this line of questioning too hard for fear of damaging our rapport.

In general, however, all the interviewees were very open, candid and enthusiastic. The initial question in particular - about lifetime engagement in running - often elicited long monologues that required little or no prompting or encouragement from me and provided rich and useful detail. As I brought the interview to a close, I asked whether the interviewee wanted to talk about anything else that they had not touched on so far. This resulted in a wide range of additional material, covering topics such as drug use amongst recreational runners, the commercialisation of running, sporting ambitions for interviewees' children and accounts of 'finest moments' in the sport. After the interviews were formally completed and the recorder switched off a small number of respondents voiced strong opinions 'off the record' about personal bugbears. For instance, one runner complained about the behaviour of a certain race organiser she perceived as masquerading as a volunteer organisation whilst making large sums of money for its managers and owners. She had professional contact with this organisation, so did not want to risk making these views public by discussing them within the interview. These kinds of incidents help shed useful

interpretative light on earlier comments and allusions and were noted in my interview records for use during the analysis phase.

Whilst the researcher-subject relationships formed during this process were very brief and the chance of a respondent feeling exploited or 'abandoned' (see Pilcher, 2012) was relatively small, I took care to ensure interviewees had my contact details and knew they could contact me if they had any question about the interview or how the data would be used. I also offered to send them updates on the findings in the form of blog posts. I sent each respondent a 'thank you' email after their interview which also included a link to the survey so that they could easily complete this, allowing me to connect their qualitative testimony to the quantitative data.

### **3.6.6 Transcribing and analysing the interviews**

After each interview I transcribed the recording, appending contextual details compiled from my interview notes. This was a time consuming and laborious process (see Fielding and Thomas, 2006), particularly because I took time to ensure the transcription was verbatim so that no useful verbal information was lost. However, as well as providing the raw materials for later coding, this painstaking work was also helpful in increasing my familiarity with the text. Listening and attending to the recordings closely helped remind me of much useful content I had forgotten since conducting the interviews, and played an important role in informing ideas for coding categories. To help familiarise myself further I transferred the recordings onto an MP3 player and listened to them all again whilst out running.

Once all the interviews had been transcribed and listened to again, I read through the transcripts adding to an initial list of potential thematic categories for coding, getting an idea of the volume of material in each possible category and further increasing my familiarity with the texts. The final list of themes was derived from a combination of my analysis of the quantitative data, which identified distinctive orientations to running linked to particular practices and motivations, and qualitative insights into experiences and attitudes gleaned from the interview data. Coding data reliably (i.e. consistently) can be difficult, and

there is little literature in this area to fall back on (Campbell et al. 2013), so I had to use my judgement to code individual statements and passages into different themes. I used Microsoft Excel to manipulate my transcripts and code excerpts in a way that enabled them to be sorted thematically later. Because this process involves working from written texts rather than audio or visual recordings it places 'emphasis on what is said rather than how it is said' (Riessman, 2004, cited in Bryman 2004: 412). As such, when a piece of text could be construed as ambiguous (for example ironic or joking) I referred to the audio recording for corroboration. Once the texts had been fully coded lists of themed comments were extracted and compiled for analytical purposes.

### **3.6.7 Media Research**

As well as analysing the data generated by my original survey and interview research and that available through the Active People Survey I also – to a limited extent and in specific areas – drew on media and marketing discourse around running. In the findings that follow, I have referred to content from a number of texts and images from running related media including books, magazines, websites, social media platforms, as well as articles discussing running in more mainstream publications such as national newspapers or news websites. These documents represent a fraction of the documentary sources I consulted whilst conducting this research, and were chosen to illustrate or explore ideas and themes that emerged from the primary data. I have also presented analysis and discussion of some documents, particularly advertisements, within a more interpretative framework (see Alexander, 2006). Here the emphasis was on highlighting the ways in which values were encoded into the images or texts in order to appeal to different groups.

Analysis of advertising can be a powerful way of understanding a promoted practice's cultural meanings and affinities, and has been deployed usefully by numerous researchers, including by Boime (2010), Del Rosso (2017) and Liu (2015). In my study it proved especially useful when analysing the meanings around obstacle course racing (OCR). This is a relatively new form of running (in its guise as a mass participation event) that has experienced a rapid rise in popularity over the last ten years, attended by heavy promotion across digital

and traditional media. Advertising around OCR was a useful source of insights into the ways in which the cultural meanings attached to this form were actively and strategically shaped to position it in a profitable 'niche' within the sporting field, and to appeal to the tastes of social groups hitherto underrepresented in the sport.

### **3.7 Ethical issues during the research process**

The research design and delivery, as well as the data analysis, adhered to BSA guidelines and was approved by my department's ethics committee. Survey responses were stored anonymously, though respondents were given the option to leave an email address if they wanted to receive details of the findings. Survey responses from interviewees, when indicated in charts included in this thesis (for instance in the cloud of individuals associated with the MCA plots), are labelled with pseudonyms. The reasons for the survey along with the planned uses of the data were explained to participants ahead of providing their responses. The data was stored securely under password protection and not passed on to third parties.

Interviewees were provided with a full description of what the interview was about, my background, and what would happen to the data they provided. They were also provided with a consent form which required their signature before the interview could take place. I sent them copies of both documents before the interview so that they were fully informed ahead of my arrival and brought paper copies with me too. As with the survey data presented in this thesis, interview excerpts have been labelled with pseudonyms, and any information that could identify the interviewees (for instance club names or races won) has been disguised.

It was made clear to interviewees that their participation in the interview was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time should they want to. Although in the main the interview topics were unlikely to be controversial, certain areas required extra sensitivity. This was true around discussions of body weight/image and dieting, particularly with female interviewees, at least one of whom appeared somewhat reticent to talk about this in depth (as discussed

earlier). A more significant number of interviewees volunteered personal medical information relating to both physical and mental health. Here, I was careful to allow the interviewees to set the parameters of the discussion and took care to avoid asking upsetting or intrusive questions.

After the survey was completed an opportunity was provided for respondents to give feedback on the questions it included. Interviewees were provided with a similar opportunity, both by a question at the end of the interview asking whether they felt they had not had an opportunity to discuss everything that was important to them, and via email after the interview<sup>13</sup>. This facilitated a more balanced, two-way relationship between the respondents and the (in the case of the survey, invisible) researcher, enabling respondents to critique the very apparatus used to 'subjectify' them. This was also useful from the point of view of my own reflexivity, enabling me to see how particular questions or answers were interpreted from others' standpoints and thus helping to dispel unwarranted delusions of objectivity. It also helped me understand potential reasons for the higher non-response rates for some of the survey questions.

### **3.8 Reflections and lessons**

Like all social research, the course of this study has been influenced by the questions I chose to ask, how I asked them, and who I chose (or was able to recruit) to answer them. Readers should take account of my own personal biography in this. I am a white, middle-class man in his late 30s (when the data collection took place) – a fairly typical runner, based on the APS data. But I am also a good standard competitive runner, as well as a PhD researcher, and all these factors will have played into the questions I chose to ask, the networks of potential respondents and (more importantly) interviewees I was able to access, and my interactions with interviewees. I have mentioned how my gender may have affected how some women talked about their bodies, but I also suspect that some of the men I spoke to may have been keener to discuss times and competitive achievements because they inferred from my background and

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<sup>13</sup> Two interviewees emailed me after the interview to expand on comments they had made. These emails were appended to the interview transcripts.

appearance that I was a fellow competitor (or perhaps a 'rival' to impress). I also felt that some of my interviewees occasionally adopted a kind of sociological or psychological language in explaining their motivations or experiences that they may not have done had they not been in the presence of a 'researcher'. This is not, of course, to say that this falsifies the data in any way, but these factors should be taken into consideration as being part of the process of knowledge creation I have undertaken.

In terms of the research design, the sequential approach in which survey data was collected first had advantages in that it was possible to use this to help inform the selection of interviewees and the broad topics the interview would cover (see Creswell et al. 2002 on the sequencing of multi-methods research). However, it also meant that I did not have the opportunity to explore quantitatively some unexpected issues and themes that were raised in the subsequent interviews. A good example of this was around the importance of educational experiences for subsequent engagement in 'distinctive' forms of running by women. I was struck by the number of those female interviewees who engaged in either highly competitive running or adventurous forms like fell-running (both practices dominated by men) who had been educated in private – often all-girl - schools. I discuss possible reasons for this apparent relationship in the chapters that follow, but it would have been enlightening to have been able to assess the existence of this relationship quantitatively. A follow-up survey might have been useful here, but I had not obtained permission from the survey respondents to send further questionnaires – those who gave their email addresses after the original survey only did so in order to receive notice of when the finished thesis was available to download.

Another useful extension to the research design would have been to include focus groups made up of practitioners from particular forms of running – groups of fell-runners or track athletes, for instance. As Silva, Warde and Wright (2009) argue, studies of cultural consumption and stratification can be enhanced by providing an opportunity for groups with similar identities within a field to discuss particular issues amongst themselves rather than directly with a researcher. This allows 'more explicit forms of judgement to emerge [with] the



orientations and meanings which inform cultural division... elaborated more openly' (ibid: 7). This may have allowed a deeper exploration of the ways runners perceived themselves, and how they distinguished themselves from 'out groups' within the field – something that several interviewees touched on, often in a light-hearted way, but appeared cautious to talk about too forcefully. Focus groups, by emboldening respondents and mitigating the influence of the interviewer's social position, might then have helped reveal more about what is at stake in the 'game of culture' (see Silva and Wright, 2005) around running.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Over the course of this chapter I have set out the research problem and the specific questions this study attempts to answer. I have also described the methodology and methods I deployed in order to do this. For each of the research tools I used I have explained the process of their development, the experience of using them in the field, and some of the challenges I faced along the way that may have influenced the data that was generated.

Overall the data produced through my primary research proved to be rich and plentiful. With well over 100 individual questions answered by more than 2,600 respondents the survey data could be analysed and presented in countless ways. The results of this analysis are distilled into the maps, charts and statistics used in the chapters that follow. The interviews helped to flesh out and make meaningful some of the patterns in the data, but also generated independent insights that were not visible in the raw statistics. They both confirmed and confounded initial hypotheses based on the quantitative data, and helped generate a much more nuanced picture of the relationship between social factors and engagement in running than would otherwise have been possible.

Chapters five to nine of this thesis are dedicated to presenting and interpreting this data, starting with a chapter focusing on the results of the APS and BRS surveys. After this 'mapping' chapter, I turn to interpreting these results in more depth, using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative insights. Finally, in the Discussion chapter, I reflect on how my findings provide answers to my research questions and situate them in their wider sociological context. Before this

analysis begins, however, I want to position the subject of this research – running – in its cultural and historical context. The next chapter provides an overview of the development of running over the last two hundred and fifty years or so that is vital to interpreting the meanings attached to the sport, and to recognising the antecedents of the patterns of engagement observable in the field of running today.

## Chapter 4: Historical context

# The development of the field

### 4.1 A field in time

In order properly to comprehend running as a lifestyle choice - or set of lifestyle choices - with particular social and cultural meanings, it is essential to gain an understanding of how the sport developed historically. In this chapter I want to describe how running's institutions and culture achieved their current forms in the light of broad sociohistorical processes that transformed the whole of society over the last two hundred years or so. These changes reached into the sport through innovations and contestations of meaning and practice by various social actors, each struggling to impress their vision and values onto running. An understanding of the nature of these historical struggles is necessary to make sense of the social terrain of the field of running as it is today, and the opportunities and cultural meanings it has for participants. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 90) argue, 'we cannot grasp [field] structure without a historical, that is, genetic analysis of its constitution and of the tensions that exist between positions in it', nor can we draw conclusions about the directions of trends and changes in the field over time without placing the snapshot provided by this study into its historical context.

To help characterise the transformation of running in Britain from its earliest rustic forms into the highly institutionalised and commercialised sport we see today, the historical outline that follows draws on the ideas and concepts developed by Bourdieu, Foucault and others I have discussed already, but is also informed by the thinking of Norbert Elias, as elucidated in his 1939 *magnum opus*, *The Civilizing Process*. Elias's central thesis was that over a historical period running from the Dark Ages to modern times, the Western European mindset underwent a profound transformation. Over the course of centuries, he argued, the chaotic, brutal and impulsive medieval personality came under increasing control by external social and, later, internalised psychological restraints. Open and unregulated expressions of emotion, aggression and impulsivity, along with

evidence of the body's status as a fleshy, biological organism were increasingly repressed and viewed as shameful, even taboo. Gradually, the natural body and its 'primitive' instincts and impulses were hidden behind a socially constructed or 'civilized' body defined in terms of finely demarcated behavioural and aesthetic norms (see Elias, 2000). This change emanated in ever more exacting terms from the top of society, but gradually spread through emulation to its lower ranks, who were necessarily always a few steps behind on the civilizing ladder. As such, to be 'civilized' in Elias's sense became a powerful marker of status. Translated into Bourdieu's terms we can think of this as a gradual evolution in the habitus, driven by changes in the circumstances through which people were socialised, as well as through social emulation. The 'civilized' habitus, through its association with the upper ranks of society, acts as a form of what Bourdieu called cultural capital, and a marker of status. Elias's ideas are also compatible with those of Foucault. Elias, like Foucault, recognised a historical shift in the ways that power is asserted, from the coercive violence of medieval (and early modern) times to an increasingly exacting self-discipline exercised in relation to a set of internalised restraints, with social penalties for those who fail to conform.

As we shall see, these ideas help us make sense of two pivotal changes that I identify in running over the last two hundred years. The first of these was a 'civilizing spurt' in the Victorian era, in which running became a potent means of performing privileged social position. At this time the hurly-burly prize-contests of various kinds that had been practised for centuries at rural festivals and on city streets by the labouring classes underwent 'sportization' (Elias and Dunning, 1986) at the hands of the upper-class. Traditional games were transformed – tamed - into codified sports that were hived off from their religious or traditional contexts, denuded of their pecuniary rewards, and refined into what Bourdieu (1978: 823) called a kind of 'physical art for art's sake'. This involved the creation of a gentrified and masculinised version of the sport, 'athletics', which, because of its patrons' social and economic power, quickly became culturally dominant and has shaped the meaning and appeal of the sport down to today. The second pivotal moment came in the 1960s and 1970s when widespread changes in

attitudes to the maintenance and care of the body provided the context for running's democratisation and rapid growth.

According to Elias and Dunning (1986), sport has a special place in the civilizing process. Not only is it a key area of social life in which the civilizing impulse around both behaviour and bodies can be observed and described, it is also, paradoxically, a rare space where our hidden primal instincts can – temporarily – be given free rein. Sport, they argued, is a kind of escape valve for the pent-up psychological pressure caused by the suppression of pre-social drives, a safe place for experiencing excitement, physical competition and passion in our otherwise sanitised, emotionally buttoned-up society. And of course, sport also provides an arena in which bodies are indispensable, visible and central, thus providing a sharp focus on the changing values and norms that surround them. So, the civilizing process provides a useful framework for thinking about the direction and logic of change in running, as well as the role it plays in individuals' lives. But, as Featherstone (1991) points out, a focus on this process should not blind us to the impact of other macro-level trends that may push in other directions or complicate this picture. And we should remember that, as Bourdieu and others have argued, sport should be understood not simply as a means for blowing off steam somewhere safely distant from the civilized 'real world', but also as a way of making a very public statement about who one is and where one stands in wider social space and in relation to its values and norms.

An important factor in shaping the values and norms of contemporary Britain has been the rise of neoliberalism over the last forty years. As described earlier, this can be characterised as a process involving the deregulation of enterprise, the increasing centrality of market mechanisms and competition to govern society, and an emphasis on individual choice and responsibility (see Mayes, 2016). As Foucault argued, these changes can be linked to a gradual displacement of law as a means of governing populations in favour of norms, codes of conduct and self-regulation (see Foucault, 2007; McNay, 2009) that shape subjectivities and encourage self-discipline. Foucault calls this governmentality. In this context certain personal attributes, such as self-reliance, self-responsibility (particularly with regards one's health), independence, competitiveness, focus and energy,

have been imbued with especially high moral and economic value. And these characteristics appear to fit closely with the supposed attributes of successful runners. This opens up the possibility – which I will explore below - that the rise in popularity of running over the last few decades can be understood as connected to the rise of neoliberalism and the intensification of biopolitical governmentality over the same period. There also appear to be a fit with running and other trends associated with neoliberalism, such as the current *zeitgeist* for ‘self-optimisation’ around health and productivity (Cederström and Spicer, 2017), our infatuation with technology, data and metrics (Muller, 2018), the increasingly moral tone of debates around maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Mayes, 2016), and body image conscious, social media narcissism (Storr, 2017). As the history below relates, as well as multiplying and magnifying the meanings expressible through running, neoliberalism has also brought vastly increased commercialisation and diversification to the sport. This has led to huge increases in participation and a much wider range of forms of running becoming available, each packaged to appeal to the particular tastes and values of different groups.

#### **4.2 Mud, sweat and cheers: Running’s rural roots**

Although they are likely to have been a part of rural communities for centuries before, the earliest reliable evidence of running races in England is as part of rustic festivals held during the sixteenth century (Whannel, 1983). These festivals were often embedded in long-standing religious tradition, taking place annually on the founding day of the local church or on its patron saint’s day, but they could also be associated with secular events such as markets or fairs (see Gotaas, 2009). Such festivals offered hard working rural labourers a rare opportunity to escape the daily drudgery, and as such were raw and rowdy affairs, with eating, drinking and playing (often violent) sports and games the order of the day. Running races were some of the least dangerous contests open to revellers, although physical contact and a degree of violence, including barging and tripping, appear to have been acceptable in many races. Cheering, jeering and leering from noisy and often inebriated crowds, as well as occasional interventions in races by spectators, were par for the course. Bodies were on display, with runners (both men and women) sometimes participating in states

of undress that would have been shocking to the 'civilized' classes, but delighted running's more earthy crowds. Novelty races such as between people with buckets on their heads, elderly women or men with wooden legs have also been recorded. Eichberg (1990), taking a similar line to Elias, argues that these early races were part of a European 'culture of laughter' that acted as a kind of social safety valve by providing an opportunity for the common people to get together and let off steam by poking fun at their 'betters' without fear of reprisal, rather like carnival in other contexts (see Humphrey, 2001).

But as well as sitting outside the concerns of day-to-day working life the contests included in these festivities also reflected wider economic hierarchies. The events offered opportunities to display the forms of physical capital most useful (and readily transposable into economic forms) within the rural communities of the time. Strong male bodies (i.e. the bodies of productive farm labourers) were especially valuable in this context, and as such the best prizes were often attached to men's strength-based contests (see Eichberg, 1990). Fleet-footedness was less useful and prestigious, except in some upland pastoral areas such as the Lake District, where shepherds and mountain guides would race to attract the attention of wealthy patrons and thus to secure a valuable position in the local economic field (see Askwith, 2004). Economic capital was also involved in the form of prizes, which could range from a cut of meat or item of clothing through to quite significant amounts of money. A prize of £20 was shared between the male and female winners of the annual Running Lands Races, which took place in Kent from 1639 (when the prize was worth over £3,000 in today's money) until well into the nineteenth century (see Gotaas, 2009: 75).

Rural races were relatively egalitarian affairs, with women able to compete as well as men. In fact, according to Radford (2001: 27), 'it was women and girls who were the runners in rural culture... men and boys also ran sometimes, but they also wrestled, cudgelled... and climbed greasy poles'. And the reports of foreign visitors support this assertion. A Frenchman visiting England in the first half of the eighteenth century remarked that 'young damsels are to be seen contending for the prize at a course. They are uncommonly strong robust country girls, who run with surprising swiftness' (J.B. LeBlanc, quoted in

Guttmann, 1991: 73). Races were also open to people of all ages, with records of races for children and veterans (over 35s) of both genders. Radford's unpublished research, discussed in Gotaas (2009), identifies 20 different annual women's races in villages in the county of Kent alone during the eighteenth century. Because winners were often excluded from competing at the same race twice talented runners would travel around the county looking for opportunities to compete at different races and to accrue as much economic capital as possible. We do not know all of the distances competed over, but they were probably long sprints of 200m to 400m (see Gotaas, 2009).

The tradition of rural games reached its peak in the seventeenth century with the inauguration of Robert Dover's Cotswold Olimpicks. This was a hugely popular multi-sport event held annually over two days starting in (probably) 1612 (see Haddon, 2005). Dover was a well-heeled lawyer and a respected poet, and he blended earthy rural sports with high-flown Greek themes to create an event that attracted crowds of thousands from across the social spectrum – a rare gathering of everyone from farm labourers to royalty. Part of Dover's motivation for creating the Games may have been to counter the growing influence of Puritanism, which sought to curb village games and revels. This could explain why royals were keen to show their support; the Games offered a rare chance for aristocrats and agricultural workers to show solidarity in the face of the largely middle-class Puritan movement.

Dover's Games were forced to a halt by the Civil War, but returned after the Restoration, and ran unbroken for almost 200 years. Reports from the Victorian years suggest that though still drawing huge crowds, the Games had degenerated into a wild revel frequented by hooligans, drunks and prostitutes. One is left to wonder to what extent this reflected a change in the nature of the Games themselves, or the increasingly 'civilized' mores of the middle-class Victorians who were condemning them. In the 1850s the social and economic might of the Games' middle-class opponents prevailed; the traditional Olimpicks



field was purchased and enclosed by a local clergyman (and long-time opponent of the Games). Without a venue, the Cotswold Olimpicks came to an end<sup>14</sup>.

At almost exactly the same time as Dover's Olimpicks were being shut down another Olympic styled rural sports event was being founded by surgeon and magistrate Dr William Penny Brookes of the Wenlock Olympian Society. This event, however, catered very much to staid Victorian middle-class tastes, and came complete with a strong patriarchal social agenda. The event was organised for 'the promotion of the moral, physical and intellectual improvement of the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood of Wenlock and especially of the working-classes' (Magnay, 2011). A look at the programme for the 1867 edition of the Wenlock Olympics suggests that unlike at the earlier Dover Olimpicks, adult women were not allowed to compete, although there were knitting and sewing contests for girls! The Wenlock version of the Olympics is said to have been a significant influence on Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who founded the modern Olympics shortly after visiting Wenlock in 1890 (ibid). In 1994 Juan Antonio Samaranch, the International Olympic Committee President, described Dr Brookes as 'the founder of the Modern Olympic Games'. No mention of Dover's less starchy but significantly earlier Olimpicks here. In the light of future events, the class and morality-based struggle over the Cotswold Olimpicks and the establishment of a sanitised, moralistic, middle-class and exclusively male alternative in its place can be seen as reflecting wider conflicts over the nature and meaning of running that will be discussed below.

For hundreds of years, rural sports provided a site at which the bodies of the lower social orders were put in motion and on display, appreciated, and leered and laughed at. They facilitated the display of physical capital and its conversion into economic rewards, and offered those at the bottom of the social hierarchy a chance to escape the grinding realities of their day-to-day lives. But as the nineteenth century wore on, the massive movement of country people into towns and cities provoked by industrialisation weakened this tradition, and rural fairs and wakes declined in many parts of Britain. There were exceptions. Some

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<sup>14</sup> A century later the Cotswold Olimpicks was revived again, and has become an almost unbroken annual fixture since 1965 until today.

stubbornly rural places such as the Lake District maintained a strong village sport tradition with new running races inaugurated at places like Lothersdale in 1847 and Grasmere in 1868. These benefitted from the new tourism boom facilitated by the railways, with some races attracting many thousands of spectators (Askwith, 2004). And of course, the workers who had headed into town looking for work had not left their love of sports behind them. In many places the village fair was replaced with a town sports day (Lovesey, 1979). However, it was not as a participation event, but as a spectator sport that running would blossom in this rapidly urbanising society. A new form, better fitted to the modernising, entrepreneurial, newspaper-reading nation would become the most celebrated and popular in newly industrial Britain.

### **4.3 Anything but pedestrian: Early professional runners**

The roots of the 19<sup>th</sup> century vogue for foot-racing and completing feats of endurance for money - or pedestrianism as it was more commonly known - run back well beyond the industrial revolution, and are often explained as an evolution of the seventeenth century aristocratic pastime of organising races between footmen. Footmen were the glamorous, well-paid professional runners of their day – high in both physical and economic capital – and, rather like racehorses, were sometimes raced against each other to entertain or resolve a wager between their upper-class masters. In Samuel Pepys' diary for 10 August 1660, for example, he reports watching a 'fine foot-race' three times round Hyde Park (see Shearman, 2012) between a former footman and an Irish rival. However, wager racing really took off from 1765, when much larger public events were organised (Oldfield, 2014). At this time competitors ranged widely across the social spectrum and the most successful were famous throughout the country (Radford, 2003 cited in Gotaas, 2009). They included Abraham Wood (a gypsy), Foster Powell (a clerk) and, most famous of all, Captain Barclay (a wealthy Scottish Laird and son of an MP). The last of these astounded the nation with a series of athletic performances in the early nineteenth century, including travelling 1,000 miles in 1,000 consecutive hours (42 days) to win an astronomical wager of 1,000 guineas, and completing 110 miles on foot in just 19 hours (Adams, 2015). Barclay epitomises how, at this time, physical capital could

be converted simultaneously into economic capital *and* forms of symbolic capital valued by the upper-class – his achievements were certainly not sullied by having earned money through his sport as they would have been in later times (discussed below). On the contrary, Barclay appeared to embody the virtues that the British ruling class liked to think of as their own: The unique combination of physical and moral fibre that enabled – entitled - them to rule over an empire of lesser folk, both at home and abroad. Barclay sparked a minor craze for pedestrianism amongst the upper-classes and was lauded in the press and written about admiringly for long afterwards (Adams, 2015).

At this time then, men of all classes could be seen participating in running contests. Women competed too, but only those drawn from the lower social orders. Female pedestrians sometimes played on assumptions about their relative bodily frailty to encourage punters to place bets against them. An elderly Irish woman became something of a folk hero in England in the 1820s after covering 90 miles in 24 hours to win a wager (Radford, 1994). Crowds would throng the streets to watch her pass and small fortunes were bet on the outcome. In the same decade an eight-year-old girl called Emma Freeman supported her whole family by winning wagers around the country, covering distances of up to 40 miles at a time (Gotaas, 2009). As these examples attest, women were certainly active participants at this time, but their status as curiosities might suggest a change from the earlier rural tradition in which women were seen as natural runners.

The growth of pedestrianism was facilitated by urbanisation. Concentrations of population were honeypots to those who wanted to create a sensation and attract a crowd (and plenty of economic capital for themselves). Many famous pedestrians toured the urban centres to make a living, with entrepreneurial publicans often providing venues and helping to promote the races. This enabled a gradual relocation of running events from racecourses and turnpike roads to busy urban centres where more money could be made (Oldfield, 2014). At this stage, an organised and fairly coherent competitive field made up of working-class male pedestrians emerged, with a pecking order of champions and challengers and exotic sobriquets like ‘The Highland Stag’, ‘Old England’ and ‘The

Gateshead Clipper', as well as nascent institutions including stables (i.e. training groups), race organisers and promoters - and significant economic and symbolic capital at stake. Through this field, runners' physical capital could become a valuable resource for social climbing. Ben Hart, lauded in the press as 'the best runner from 100 yards to quarter mile in the British Empire' began life as a weaver earning just £14 per year. In his heyday as a runner during the mid-1830s he was earning over £100 per race and retired a rich and respected member of the middle-class, owning a string of pubs and sporting concerns (Swain, 2014).

The close relationship between pubs, urban working life and the burgeoning field of pedestrianism lessened its appeal to the middle- and upper-classes as the stifling moral climate of the Victorian age descended. Now, not only drinking but also gambling were regarded as terrible sins. Victorian mores also made it increasingly unacceptable for women to participate in physically demanding sport. Victorian women were seen as 'incapable and ultimately disabled such as [they] must be protected and prohibited from serious participation in society' (Duffin, 1978: 26). As such, the extreme bodily exertions of a running race were not only seen as contrary to the nature or essence of femininity, they were also perceived as physically dangerous. And indeed there are few records of women runners from the coronation of Queen Victoria until the latter years of the nineteenth century (Gotaas, 2009).

Although pedestrianism remained popular with the working-class, it developed an increasingly unsavoury reputation for cheating, race fixing and crowd violence as the nineteenth century wore on (see Lovesey, 1979). Middle-class attitudes to the great feats of endurance that had once been regarded as wonders also became more ambivalent. Whilst the progress of the pedestrian tour of England by American writer and famous long-distance walker, Edward Payson Weston, was reported in daily newspapers with enthusiasm in the 1870s (Marshall, 2008), other efforts by men of humbler stock were often ridiculed. William Gale, a Welshman and physical trainer who covered 1,500 miles in 1,000 hours in 1877 (50% more than the storied Captain Barclay had ever achieved), was described in contemporary articles as 'an aged-looking man... under-sized with lacklustre

eyes' and decidedly 'bandy', who had the 'determination of a dog' ('Sickening Spectacles', 1877, quoted in Adams, 2015: 29). The same commentator went on:

'The London Omnibus Company possesses many an animal that never gives in, starts when the door is banged, and sleeps standing in its stall. The "sporting press" has got hold of a biped that does pretty much the same. William Gale can endure, but he does not look either a bright or a very intellectual specimen of humanity' ('Sickening Spectacles', 1877, quoted in Adams, 2015: 29).

Not only was Gale's small, tough working-class body the subject of disgust for his middle-class critics, so were his feats of animal or machinelike (both metaphors were commonplace) endurance. 'Such exhibitions' pronounced one writer, were not befitting of 'a country which, we trust will ever pride itself on a nobler civilization than that which is founded upon mere physical endurance' ('Feats of Endurance,' 1877 quoted in Adams, 2015: 29). Pedestrianism – and by extension, those who practised it - were described by their privileged detractors as 'sinful', 'stupid', 'cruel', 'barbaric' and 'boring' (see Adams, 2015: 27). Such attitudes contrast starkly with the adulation heaped upon the aristocratic Captain Barclay half a century before, and with the admiration reserved for the graceful bodies and the dash and (supposedly) effortless élan of upper-class track athletics, which was emerging as a rival form of racing in the wider field at this time (more on this below).

The few women who challenged convention by participating in feats of endurance in this period were subject to a mixture of fascination and scathing criticism. Against the wishes of her mechanic husband, Emma Sharp, a Yorkshire woman in her early thirties, attempted to emulate Captain Barclay's 1000 miles in 1000 hours in 1864. The feat took place in the grounds of a pub, with Emma wearing men's clothing and bringing a loaded pistol and her dog for protection. A large crowd watched her progress, a significant part of which was quite hostile. Hot embers were thrown in her path, and she faced jeers and insults. Eighteen police officers were required to protect her at points during the challenge, and a supporter walked in front of her with a rifle at night. Emma's husband, John, reportedly hid in the pub, embarrassed by his wife's undignified performance.

Despite the physical and psychological ordeal (and a lack of training) Emma Sharp managed to equal Captain Barclay's achievement, earning a substantial sum of money (see Barnett, 2009). By the late 1870s and 1880s a small number of other working-class women had entered the emerging transatlantic field of professional pedestrianism, competing for the significant economic capital it offered in both Britain and the United States. Female pedestrians were celebrated by the suffragettes for overturning stereotypes and showcasing how, unshackled from social constraints that artificially suppressed their physicality, women's bodies were capable of feats of athleticism equal to those of men (Shaulis, 1999). Naturally then, they also attracted criticism from conservative critics, with newspapers disparaging female pedestrians as immoral, 'coarse, rough women' (Steele, 1879), or depicting them as coerced victims of male greed.

Towards the turn of the century, pedestrianism's popularity began to wane as football and other spectator sports displaced it from its important position in the field of working-class leisure time pursuits. Simultaneously it was losing its status within running's field of production under aggressive challenge from a new form of the sport organised by and for upper-class men. This new form – track athletics - had been developed explicitly to provide a sanitised alternative to pedestrianism that was more in keeping with the habitus of society's ruling class. And it is to the emergence of this rival form of running and its clash with pedestrianism and professional running that I turn next.

#### **4.4 Watershed: The civilizing of running**

Parallel to the largely working-class forms of running discussed above, which centred on festivity, spectacle and gambling, men and boys of the upper-class had, for centuries, been partaking of a quite different running tradition that focused on bodily and moral self-improvement. This was running as a didactic tool designed to equip privileged young men to ascend to their lofty stations in adult – and especially military - life. Early evidence of this can be found in the works of sixteenth century educationalists, Sir Thomas Elyot and Richard Mulcaster. Citing as role models those perfect knights of antiquity, Alexander and Achilles, they argued for running to be included in public school boys'

curricula as a counterbalance to intellectual work that could easily weaken the constitution and soften the spirit. Running was recommended as 'both a good exercise and a laudable solace' that 'maketh the spirites of a man more stronge and valiant' as well as 'adapting his body... to helpe therwith hym selfe in perile, whiche may happen in warres' (Elyot, 2005: XVI). For the upper ranks of society then, running has a long history as a technique for disciplining and developing the capital of both body and mind.

Running races were a part of the boys' public school educational experience throughout the nineteenth century – part of an elaborate system designed to inculcate the high levels of cultural capital that would perpetuate upper-class privilege for another generation. A 'paper chase' cross-country race, for instance, features prominently in *Tom Brown's School Days*, based on the author's experiences in the 1830s (see Hughes, 2013). Throughout the Victorian era sport became increasingly important in the education of upper-class boys, a process that gained impulse from the Muscular Christianity movement and the government's Clarendon Commission's report on private schooling, which highlighted the value of sport in character building and creating discipline. Once again physical exercise was touted to develop boys' martial virtues, including 'physical and moral courage, loyalty and cooperation and the ability both to command and to obey' (Horne et al., 2011: 863). It was also commonly perceived as a way of preventing immorality, particularly in the forms of homosexuality and masturbation (Whannel, 1983). The Victorian upper-class understood sport as a way to develop boys into 'manly gentlemen' (Horne et al. 2011: 864) and ideal soldiering material, as manifest in the poetry of Henry Newbolt ('Play up and play the game!') and the quote that 'the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton', which is often attributed to Wellington but probably originated some years after his death (Knowles, 2009). It was only at the end of Victoria's reign – after the struggles of the Second Boer War - that it began to be seen as important to develop working-class physical capital for similar military reasons.

For much of the Victorian era, most middle- and upper-class girls were excluded from anything other than gymnastic type exercises both because anything seen as more vigorous or competitive was thought unfeminine and vulgar, and

because refined women were seen as too fragile to participate without risking their health, and particularly their ability to have children (see Scraton, 1992). This ideology, which drew on ideas of the 'woman as invalid' (Ehrenreich and English, 1975) and a middle-class 'cult of domesticity' (Guttmann, 1991), was challenged at the time by both men and women, including the polymath Herbert Spencer, who argued that 'for girls as well as boys, the sportive activities to which the instincts impel are essential to bodily welfare' (Spencer, 1861: 51), and Harriet Martineau, who in 1850 prescribed running as well as swimming, tree climbing and rowing as vital to girls' healthy development (Guttmann, 1991: 90). However, conventional wisdom prevailed across the 100 private girls' schools considered by the Schools Inquiry Commission in 1868 (see Scraton, 1992), which reported that 32 provided nothing but calisthenics, and 66 offered nothing more than walking, croquet and dancing. But as Deem (1981) points out, ideologies must be interpreted (and can be challenged) locally, and it was in a handful of these elite institutions that the seeds of change were sown. The North London Collegiate School for Ladies' first Head Teacher, Frances Buss, blazed a trail by encouraging girls' participation in team sports like hockey, netball and tennis from as early as 1880. Even more progressive – and scandalous – was Roedean School, founded by the three Lawrence sisters in 1885, which from the start offered at least two hours of outdoor exercises and competitive sport every day, including hockey, cycling, tennis, lacrosse and running (Guttmann, 1991). By the end of the Victorian era several other girls' schools and universities had followed suit (see Scraton, 1992; Guttmann, 1991). Despite these advances, which at this stage only benefited a small, privileged minority, vigorous and especially competitive athletic activity for girls and women was resisted by a noisy group of educationalists, medical professionals, social Darwinists and assorted guardians of public morals until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And it should also be noted that even some of the progressives who supported elite women's sport did so for quite conservative reasons to do with improving women's capacity to fulfil traditional roles as wives and mothers.

We now return specifically to running and to the mid-nineteenth century, when the working-classes were enjoying the boom years of pedestrianism as a



spectator sport, and new venues were opening across the country (Martin, 2014). At around this time the running contests at the great boys' public schools had begun to be distilled into a set of recognised events, which, through the influence of their former students, spread to Cambridge and Oxford universities, where the first men's athletics meetings and clubs were formed. The new upper-class, all-male (and all-white) 'athletics', though ostensibly practised for quite different reasons and by very different people to pedestrianism, was moving ever closer to it in form. With two such similar sports occupying the same sporting field the question inevitably arose as to which represented the pinnacle of the sport – which possessed the greater symbolic capital. With hindsight, a clash of ideology and class for domination of running's field of production now appears to have been inevitable.

Athletics differed from pedestrianism in a number of important practical and symbolic ways. First, there was a clear valorisation of speed over endurance, ideally achieved effortlessly, thus fitting 'elite constructions of athleticism, the athletic spirit [and] the athletic body' (Tulle, 2008). The gruelling long-distance events so popular in pedestrianism were excluded<sup>15</sup>, with road running left largely to the working-classes for decades to come (Cooper, 1998). The habitus of gilded upper-class youths emphasised the 'civilized' body, deployed in controlled, efficient bursts of heroic athleticism rather than sweating, panting, untidy exhibitions of brutal endurance – which may also have seemed too resonant of working-class life in the factory or field<sup>16</sup>. Athletics meetings were also much more strictly codified, with universal rules soon agreed across all competitions. This included running in lane, which reduced the risk of interpersonal violence and contact between bodies, and the timing of races, which, because of the standardisation of track surfaces and lengths, enabled the

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<sup>15</sup> Until the 1930s there was only one race over a mile in length at the British Championships.

<sup>16</sup> On the cultural meanings of athletic effort: During the 1950s, the famous Czech long-distance runner Emil Zátopek was held up as paragon of work ethic to the communist proletariat because of the incredibly demanding training schedule that turned him into a world beater (Askwith, 2016). Conversely, at the same time, the upper-middle-class Englishman, Roger Bannister, who was the first person to break the four-minute mile, was widely admired in Britain for his legendarily lax training habits. He claimed to run three times per week for just 45 minutes each. Later he admitted he may have been exaggerating; it might have peaked at four times (Gotaas, 2009).

keeping of centralised records. Perhaps most importantly, payment for racing and betting by competitors were prohibited – athletics was strictly amateur. This was justified to avoid the race fixing and crowd violence that was dogging pedestrianism at the time, but also acted as a mechanism for excluding anyone who could not fund their own participation, helping to bind the sport more tightly to participants' stocks of economic capital and social class. Athletics was developed as an autonomous sphere dominated by a homogenous group of privileged white men, hived off from the diverse external social and economic world that was so integral to pedestrianism, and ostensibly practised for its own sake and according to a self-contained system of rules. In other words, it was being 'civilized' - brought into line with bourgeois tastes for 'elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world' (Bourdieu, 2010: xxviii) and shaped by ideas of rationality and the emotionally restrained, upper-class masculine sporting philosophy of 'fair play'.

For many upper- and middle-class Victorians this felt like progress, and was just one example of a wider process that reached its peak in the second half of the nineteenth century, in which a range of traditional 'games' were distilled into codified 'sports' through their decoupling from particular social occasions, ritual meanings and explicit relationship to economic capital, as well as their rationalisation through universally applied rules, standards and record keeping (Elias and Dunning, 1986). In the words of Bourdieu, a relatively small group of middle- and upper-class men 'took over a number of *popular – i.e. vulgar – games*, simultaneously changing their meaning and function in exactly the same way as the field of learned music transformed the folk dances... which it introduced into high-art forms such as the suite' (Bourdieu, 1993: 119). But this was more than simply a process of creating an alternative way of doing running in tune with the tastes of a particular group. For not only did the privileged men who developed athletics want to promote their form of the sport as *the* definitive form of running, they also wanted to prevent athletes from other social groups – women and the working-class (who at that time included most members of ethnic minorities) – from taking part.

By 1866 athletics had come under the auspices of the newly formed Amateur Athletic Club. Run entirely by a clique of privileged white men rooted in the traditions of the British public schools and universities, and strongly influenced by the Muscular Christianity movement (Gotaas, 2009), the AAC began a moral crusade against 'professional' running (i.e. pedestrianism), and from the start their conflation of 'professional' and 'working-class' was barely hidden. The AAC promoted running as an elitist sport exclusively for 'gentlemen amateurs' to compete 'without being compelled to mix with [largely working-class] professional runners' (Bailey, 1978: 131). Any euphemism was swept aside in their official constitution, which expressly forbid mechanics, artisans or labourers from taking part, on the grounds that their physical occupations gave them an unfair advantage. Women of all classes were excluded from this boys' club too, with pioneering women athletes only able to compete in 'unofficial' events (i.e. those not affiliated with the self-elected authorities of the sport) until the formation of the Women's Amateur Athletics Association in 1922 (see below).

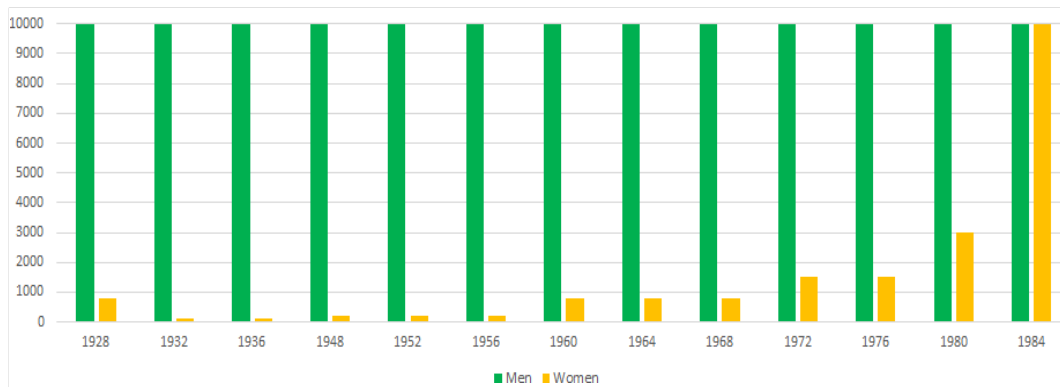
Although the AAC was replaced by the Amateur Athletics Association in 1880, which had a slightly more socially inclusive ethos in terms of class, the rigid demand for amateurism, with its implicit bias towards those who did not need financial incentives to run (i.e. the middle and upper classes) and the complete exclusion of women remained in place. The AAA became the most powerful force in the sport over the following years, and waged a century long war against rival 'professional' forms of running, banning for life from approved races any runner who had ever accepted money for competing (they were also excluded from the Olympic Games, which began in their modern form in 1896). Bans were also applied to any runner who had ever participated in a race in which a professional was running or where prizes were available, even if they did not win anything, *even* if the participants were children (see Askwith, 2004; Jones, 2011). Transgressors were dealt with ruthlessly, with the AAA taking those accused of professionalism to court for fraud, leading to sentences of up to six months hard labour (Lovesey, 1979). Such measures were not required to exclude women, for the simple reason that the AAA refused to organise races in which women could compete, or to admit women as members.

Just as 'professional' running continued in the shadow of the rise of amateur athletics, the exclusion of women from the AAA in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not, of course, prevent them from participating in running entirely, even if records of women's involvement in the sport in this period are hard to come by (see Gotaas, 2009). Those women who did participate did so against a cultural background in which women's bodies were understood to be 'physically limited' (see Carter, 2012: 153) and where even the chairperson of the British Medical Association could, in 1887, argue that 'in the interests of social progress, national efficiency and the progressive improvement of the human race, women should be denied education and other activities which would cause overstrain and inability to produce healthy offspring' (quoted in Carter, 2012: 153). Such attitudes provided a key justification for maintaining the AAA as an all-male club for many decades, but were increasingly challenged, not only by women and girls who were taking to sport in increasing numbers both in and outside education around the turn of the century (see Scraton 1992: 36), but also by some social hygienists and eugenicists, who argued that physically strong and healthy young women were essential to revitalising the health of a nation weakened by the rise of industrial working and squalid living conditions (Long and Marland, 2009). The poor state of women's bodies had become a threat to national survival – weak women were said to give birth to weak children who would grow into poor soldiers or mothers; an improvement in the physical capital of the nation's women was demanded in order to avoid national catastrophe in the wars of the future. Responding to this, in the early twentieth century numerous government and private initiatives began to promote the nation's bodily health and fitness and encouraged men and women of all classes to engage in physical training (see Carter, 2012). The amount and types of PE available to schoolgirls – particularly those educated privately – increased during this period, albeit within a framework still delimited by highly restrictive norms of femininity and medical advice that warned girls not to engage in sport too vigorously – 'injudicious exercise' was still seen as potentially impairing both 'womanly qualities', i.e. femininity, and the ability to have and feed children (see Still, 1922: 11).

During the First World War women took on many working roles formerly dominated by men, and there are records of women's sprint races run by various organisations as part of wartime charity sports days (Duval, 2001). With the peace came further opportunities for women runners, including the first recorded international competitions and the first (unaffiliated) women's athletics teams, which formed in 1921 (ibid). Despite this, the AAA continued to oppose women's participation in the sport and frustrated their requests for admission. The result of this intransigence was the establishment of a parallel organisation, the Women's Amateur Athletics Association (WAAA), in 1922. The foundation of the WAAA was a major advance for women's athletics, opening up a parallel sporting field to that of men's athletics that, by 1925, had attracted women from across the social spectrum, from university teams to factory 'girls' clubs (Zweiniger-Bargielowksa, 2011: 310). Publicly, the WAAA claimed to be as much about disciplining women's bodies in the national interest as it was about female liberation; in keeping with the eugenic and social Darwinist ideas of the times, their stated aim was 'to improve the physique and physical efficiency of the nation' (see Zweiniger-Bargielowksa, 2011: 308). And indeed, whilst the WAAA encouraged women to race at all distances, debates about whether and how seriously women should participate in athletics – particularly in school and at the international level which was still controlled by men - continued to be framed by ideas about women's reproductive and more general health for many years to come (see Scruton, 1992; Zweiniger-Bargielowksa, 2011; Duval, 2001). Indeed, women's participation in long- or even middle-distance track races at the Olympics was resisted on the grounds of their supposed physical frailty right up until 1988, when a women's 10,000m was finally included in the athletics programme<sup>17</sup> (see figure 1).

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<sup>17</sup> A women's marathon – not a track race - was included one Olympiad earlier, in 1984.



*Figure 1: Longest race on the track at the Olympics in metres, for men and women.*

Compared to its treatment of women, early amateur athletics was institutionally<sup>18</sup> relatively liberal with regards ethnicity. The AAA had its first black champion as early as 1888 in Arthur Wharton, and 1920-22 champion Harry Edward was acclaimed one of the age’s greatest athletes after becoming British champion over 100, 200 and 440 yards and winning medals for Great Britain at the 1920 Olympics (Lovesey, 1979). But of course, whiteness was – and still is - implicit in the idea of Britain’s ruling class, and few non-white faces can be seen in the photographs included in the official history of the AAA before the Second World War. In fact, Wharton and Edward are the *only* black people to appear in over 70 photographs of athletics between 1866 and 1946 in AAA’s official Centenary History (Lovesey, 1979), and both reported suffering racism as a result of their success. Indeed, race was very much a live issue in athletics throughout these years, with some arguing as late as the 1940s that black and white runners should not compete together in sprints because black people had an unfair natural advantage attributable to them being ‘closer to primitive man than white people’ (American national coach in 1941, quoted in Entite, 2000: 178). Over longer distances though, it was argued that white runners were superior because they were more capable of martialling and exploiting their physical resources – thus basing their supposed superiority on a mental rather than a bodily foundation (see Gotaas, 2009), neatly fitting contemporary constructions of controlled, disciplined white middle-class masculinity.

<sup>18</sup> This is, of course, not to say that individuals involved in athletics did not hold racist views.

In more recent years, whilst debates about the relationship between race and running ability have rumbled on (see Finn, 2013), black runners have had huge success at the elite level in British sprinting. Over longer distances though, there are far fewer examples to point to (Mo Farah being the obvious recent exception), unlike on the international scene which has been dominated by black Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes for many years. Nationally, at all distances, there are very few examples of successful runners from other minority ethnic groups such as South or East Asians. Despite the highly visible success of black people in sprinting at international level for Great Britain over the last few decades, few non-white people have managed to make the transition into senior administrative roles in the sport. As one former athlete put it, athletics' institutions offer 'jobs for the boys, and I ain't part of that boys' system. I'm not the right colour' (quoted in an article on the Guardian website, 2000). And indeed, the national council for England Athletics is today composed of seven white men and just two white women (England Athletics, 2018).

For a hundred years the AAA – the privileged white male habitus in institutional form - held sway over the field of British running, bringing its *doxa* into line with this group's beliefs and values. It meted out a prolonged act of symbolic violence on women and the working-class, who were excluded or marginalised, forced into their own, less prestigious forms of running and institutions. Black runners, whilst able to compete at least, were long subject to a persistent questioning of their status as legitimate participants in this white man's world. The dominant understandings of athleticism and athletics thus came to be strongly linked to the hegemonic forms of disciplined masculinity (see Connell, 1983; Trujillo, 1991) of the ruling class, to the privileged white male body, and to the performance of middle-class, private school virtues such as fair play, elective distance and 'sportsmanship'. These associations were – and sometimes still are – strongly policed. Even leaving aside stints in jail, transgressors of the amateur code could be sneered at as competing for shabby 'ulterior motives' (i.e. economic capital), in the words of the President of the IOC in 1955 (Greene, 2013). And women athletes often suffered even crueller treatment at the hands of the authorities and the Press. A Norwegian journalist reporting on the first Olympic 800m race

wrote that 'women's participation in the 800m was an absolute horror. They set off groaning, arms flailing away... their faces were distorted and ugly, and they were trembling as if suffering from severe typhoid' (quoted in Gotaas, 2009: 271). The relationship between femininity and athletics remains a difficult one today, as exemplified by the treatment of Caster Semenya, the 2009 800m world champion, who was subjected to a series of humiliating tests and a barrage of media speculation after opponents and officials accused her of looking too masculine to properly count as a woman.

History casts a long shadow, and the influence of the opinions and ideas of yesterday still influence how running is perceived and who it appeals to today. Modern running culture draws on a mythology - a cast of heroes, famous locations and important events - that has largely been curated and composed by privileged, white, male insiders and their middle-class admirers. It reflects their values and emphasises their priorities. As a stark illustration of this, the England Athletics Hall of Fame, opened in 2008, has inducted 93 individuals in its first ten years, 70% of whom are white men. Only 22 of the inductees are women and just ten are black. Early black champion sprinters, Edward and Wharton, are not amongst them. It is easy to understand how this kind of imbalance could reinforce the existing uneven social distribution of running, with people who do not see others like themselves represented in the story of athletics perceiving it as 'not for the likes of me' and seeking other, more inclusive sporting cultures to engage with.

The domination of the field of running by privileged white men and their 'civilized' values was almost complete throughout the amateur era. But by the 1980s, changing social attitudes along with powerful new commercial actors entering the field finally resulted in the (re)introduction of professionalism to the sport and women's participation on almost equal terms. Modernisers' hands were strengthened by the exposure of a century of hypocrisy around extravagant 'expenses' payments made to 'shamateur' runners, which circumvented the ban on professionalism. In the less traditional, more commercially-minded 1980s, amateurism was unmasked as a misrecognised form of elitism, and restrictions on participation based on social background or gender were now perceived as



barriers rather than bulwarks of 'fair play' – in both a sporting and neoliberal economic sense. Since then, consumer and commercial forces have dominated the field of running, transforming its image and forms and democratising its appeal, as well as hugely increasing the flows of economic capital to its institutions and elite performers. It is to this modern phase of the sport that we turn next.

#### **4.5 Explosion: The birth of mass participation running**

Until the 1970s running was almost universally practised as a competitive sport - the preserve of athletics clubs, schools and universities. Jogging – or running purely for fitness or to lose weight - was virtually unheard of. Indeed, running on the streets could be regarded as socially subversive (Florida, 2002; Scheerder, Breedveld and Borgers, 2015). Early joggers interviewed in the film *Free to Run* (2016) recount stories of having to explain to the police what possible legitimate reason could explain why they might be running through the city after dark. These attitudes made sense in societies where public behaviour was expected to be restrained and when 'it was rare for... men or women over the age of 30... to partake in any physical activity more strenuous than yard work, bowling, golf, or light calisthenics' (Latham, 2015: 104). Pavements were places for going calmly about your business or for dignified promenading, not sites for the public display of dishevelled and sweating active bodies.

This changed in the late 1960s and 1970s as shifting cultural norms and social concerns created the opportunity for dynamic new actors to enter running's conservative field of production. They would introduce new forms of running - new ways of being a runner - that would cater to (and help create) new and more widespread tastes. Running's tight-knit, hierarchical and clearly bounded field would soon be transformed into a sprawling, heterogeneous space of lifestyle choices - and a commercial battlefield. These changes, like so many others during this period, emanated from the United States.

#### **4.6 Disciplining the body: The jogging craze**

The growth of jogging (gentle running to improve fitness) as a mass participation pastime was predicated on the emergence of new forms of habitus in America

during the 1960s, and on a new phase in the disciplining and civilizing of the body. Increasing concerns about the levels of obesity and various 'hypokinetic diseases', i.e. disorders connected to the increasingly sedentary and affluent lifestyles of the middle-classes, were a source of significant social concern from the 1950s (Latham, 2015). Scientists, politicians and doctors argued that diseases of under exercise were replacing the by then largely conquered diseases of infection and nutritional insufficiency as America's greatest health problem (see Mayes, 2016). Thus established as an urgent need, the threat of inactivity – of poor lifestyle *choices* – could stimulate a network of powers (or what Gibbon and Henriksen (2012) call 'norm-setting entities') from the 1960s onwards, including government, health educators and entrepreneurs, to encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own health and to monitor and discipline their choices around lifestyle and exercise (Mayes, 2016; Latham, 2015). This kind of indirect 'government at a distance' of a population's health via decentralised networks of micro-powers to inculcate norms of self-discipline has been characterised as a hallmark of biopolitical governmentality, as well as of the neoliberal style of government that would soon come to dominate the American (and British) economic model (Gibbon and Henriksen, 2012).

One of the many exercise programmes that emerged in response to this increased concern about the threat posed to public health by inactivity was jogging. Its rapid early growth compared to alternative regimes has been largely attributed to the work of Bill Bowerman, then University of Oregon track coach and future founder of Nike. As Latham (2015) describes, Bowerman, inspired by a visit to the health-focused running group organised by New Zealand trailblazer Arthur Lydiard and the ideas in Seymour Lieberman's 1961 book 'Rhythmic Jogging', organised jogging groups targeting sedentary, middle-aged men and women in Eugene, Oregon in 1963. The emergence of a new habitus disposed to self-discipline around health and exercise appears to be reflected in the immediate success of these groups, which attracted over a thousand people to the university athletics track within their first few days. But rather than basking in the glory Bowerman appears to have been struck by a sudden sense of responsibility. Was all this vigorous activity safe for these eager but overweight

and ageing people? Medical opinion at the time was divided. So enlisting cardiologist Waldo Harris, Bowerman set about testing the efficacy of jogging scientifically, and refining his training system to maximise measurable outcomes. The result was a jogging programme that resembled a watered-down version of the systematic training regimes used by elite track athletes in the build up to a race. Bowerman and Harris published their findings in the 1967 book, *Jogging*. It was a huge success, selling over a million copies, and gained ringing endorsements from medical practitioners as a way of getting slim, fit and healthy, and soon, by psychiatrists as a way of beating mental illness – of disciplining mind as well as body (e.g. Kostrubala, 2013 [first published 1976]).

At the time when jogging was emerging, running on public streets was unusual and could be seen as a threat to public order, sometimes attracting scorn and mockery<sup>19</sup> (see Scheerder, Koen and Breedveld, 2015; Van Bottenburg, Scheerder and Hover, 2010), but the 1960s were a time when many social conventions were being challenged. It has been argued that the greater affluence and educational opportunities of the post-war ‘baby boomer’ generation afforded them the freedom to experiment with new ideas and ways of life and to reject the constraints of traditional conformity (see Kidner et al. 2008; see also Rubin and Casper, 2013). As such, American, and later, wider Western society was undergoing a process of ‘informalisation’, with rigid, traditional behaviour codes, including those restricting vigorous physical activity in public places, being overturned (see Scheerder, Koen and Breedveld, 2015). This was part of a wider movement in late 1960s America and Europe in which traditional social and political institutions were being challenged by newly empowered young people. For some, rather than (or as well as) seeking to challenge the inequalities and injustices they saw around them, dissatisfaction turned into a search for personal liberation from what they saw as the inauthenticity and oppression of wider society (see Heath and Potter, 2004). Drugs, mysticism, therapy and religion were seen by many as ways to liberate the self from the prison of socialisation – what some called ‘false consciousness’ - and to find truth, fulfilment and perhaps answers to society’s problems, in a

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<sup>19</sup> Note that Bowerman’s early jogging groups took place on a running track, not on the streets.

realer reality. However, as numerous commentators have argued, as the optimism of '60s radicalism gave way to disillusionment during the following decade, the vogue for inner-transformation broke free of any former political justifications and became an end in itself (see Lasch, 1979; Storr, 2017; Heath and Potter, 2004). The self-absorption of the 1970s – what Lasch (1979) called the 'decade of narcissism' - had arrived.

However, the shift of emphasis from the social to the individual as the target of transformation during the 1970s was not simply a matter of disillusionment with the efficacy of the social movements of the previous decade, which had, after all, been successful in many respects. Another important factor was the rise of neoliberalism as the guiding economic and social doctrine of the decade – and those that followed. Neoliberalism installed the individual, competition and economic success as the overriding values of mainstream society. Under these conditions, the importance of campaigning for social causes diminished in many young people's lives, as they were drawn into the race to maximise personal success and to perfect the all-important 'self'. Embodying this shift, former activist and senior member of the Young Internationalist Party (Yippies), Jerry Rubin, gave up radicalism in the early 70s to become an entrepreneur, quickly amassing a fortune, large parts of which he spent on 'gestalt therapy, bioenergetics, Rolfing, massage... health foods tai chi, Esalen [therapeutic retreat], hypnotism... meditation, Silva Mind Control' (Rubin, 1976: 18) and many other forms of therapy and spiritualism. But of special relevance to this study, Rubin also jogged. He did so religiously, rising 'by 7am to jog two miles' (ibid) and fitted in extra runs between appointments later in the day. Why jogging? By this point, the body as well as the mind had become the target of self-improvement. Bodies were increasingly seen as the seat of pre-social authenticity, a source of innate wisdom we should 'listen to' and nurture (see Cederström and Spicer, 2015). Rubin 'learned to love [him]self' by giving himself 'permission to be healthy'; he says: 'I entered the consciousness movement in search of my body, my sexuality, my health, my spirit' (Rubin, 1976: 18). Like Rubin, many other Americans were turning to '[them]selves, putting faith in what [they could] muster in [their] own minds and bodies' (Jim Fixx quoted in Van Doorn, 1978; see

also Lasch, 1991; Storr, 2017) to affect a personal transformation. Within this framework, jogging had become more than simply a way to avoid an untimely death; it was a holistic mind-body self-improvement strategy - a technique for becoming a better, happier, more authentic human being fit for success in the Darwinian struggle of neoliberal society.

Linked to this, there was an increased focus on and valorisation of youth in mainstream culture during the 1970s (Stern, 2008). 'No one can appear not young any more... we are enamoured of youth' opined one academic from the Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1973 (Snider, 1973: 53). 'Anyone who says he [sic] doesn't want to look neat and trim, i.e. sexy, is a damned liar' asserted another commentator in 1971 (Guild, 1971: 172). Both women and men were encouraged to discipline their bodies in the name of health and longevity, but also to achieve a kind of eternal aesthetic youth. As Tulle (2008) has described, ageing bodies have long been understood through a biomedical discourse that positions them as pathological, in decline and malfunctioning relative to a youthful norm, and in this light older bodies can be seen as uncivilized – as uncontrolled and unreliable - evoking fear and disgust. In the 1960s concern over the 'epidemic' of ageing-related disease (Latham, 2015) magnified these fears and, for many middle-aged Americans, made them personal. People turned to running to avoid the ignominy of ageing, and 'in an attempt not to be pushed aside by the army of fresh, unlined faces running in their wake' (Reed, 1981: 98). In this cultural environment jogging could serve a dual purpose, helping to build both physical capital in the sense of bodily health and vitality, and as a type of embodied cultural capital in the form of a slim, toned and civilized 'youthful' body (see Abbas, 2004).

Moreover, as well as mental and physical healthiness, youth and beauty, running was also beginning to be associated with other attributes that chimed with the changing priorities of the 1970s. Running as a form of self-improvement and self-entrepreneurialism resonated strongly in an America increasingly gripped by the neoliberal doctrine that valorised individualism, competition and self-efficacy (see Mayes, 2016). Jogging, and especially the long-distance races that sprang up in their thousands at this time, offered an opportunity for a public

performance of self-making and commitment to personal improvement, transmitting messages about the runner's personal moral qualities and values. By the end of the decade joggers were said to see themselves as part of an 'intimidating new class: the physical elite' who swaggered conspicuously around metropolitan centres like New York in a uniform of 'satin, terry towelling [and] running shoes' (Van Doorn, 1978: [online]). They were described by the Washington Post as 'the phenomenon of the '70s' and as 'extremely professional. They are nine times as likely to be scientists, they are rich, they don't smoke, they are thin' (Leavy and Oakie, 1979: [online]). But the flip side of this was, of course, that those who failed to make this highly visible investment in themselves could be assumed to be lacking in these same virtues. Indeed, it was reported that runners saw each other as 'good and trustworthy, particularly the marathon runner' and that they 'look[ed] down on other people, thinking of them as bad, lazy, indolent, immoral' (Thaddeus Kostrubala quoted in Van Doorn, 1978: [online]).

The expanding nexus of meanings associated with running – health, youth, slimness, attractiveness, vitality, self-efficacy, personal responsibility – transformed a practice once disparaged by the Victorian elite as mindless drudgery into a powerful virtue signal. This was certainly reinforced by the fact that runners tended to come from affluent and upwardly mobile backgrounds – the 'physical elite' overlapped significantly with the socioeconomic elite (van Bottenburg, 2006). This can be understood partly because self-entrepreneurship is likely to appeal more to the habitus of groups whose prospects are not obviously limited by circumstances, but also because running regularly demands a great deal of free time and surplus energy – something only available to those who can exercise a high degree of control over how they use their time, can afford (financially) to use time in economically unproductive ways, and who are not physically exhausted at the end of a hard day's labour. In this sense, running can be understood not only as transmitting signals about middle-class virtues, but about socioeconomic status *per se* in the mode of Veblen's 'conspicuous leisure'.

In 1979 the Washington Post described a typical runner as ‘white, white collar and well off. He<sup>20</sup> earns about \$30,000 a year and probably has a graduate degree’ (Leavy and Okie, 1979: [online]). And indeed, the lifestyle runners of the 1970s were mainly young, middle-class, urban, white men (van Bottenburg, 2006; Scheerder, Breedveld and Borgers, 2015). There are few non-white faces in the pictures of joggers and road races from this period, and indeed even in 2011 black people represented less than 2% of the running population in the US, although this figure appears to have increased since then (see Ryder, 2013; Bachman, 2016). The most recent data from England suggests a somewhat more balanced picture than in America, but non-white minorities remain – then as now - underrepresented in the sport, even when socioeconomic status is accounted for. Women too, were a small minority in the early days of the ‘running boom’, with, for instance, only 10% of US marathon finishers being women in 1980, compared to 44% in 2015 according to the 2016 US National Runner Survey. In part the low levels of women runners in the 1970s and 1980s reflect lingering prejudices about women’s physical fragility. The American Athletics Union (AAU) refused to allow women to enter affiliated marathons<sup>21</sup> until 1972, and even when this rule was relaxed women had to start at a different time to men racing the same course. It was still possible in 1979 for a professor of medicine to state that ‘the effect of running on women's health is still the major problem in running’ (Dale quoted in Leavy and Oakie, 1979: [online]). And, similar reasons were used to justify the exclusion of a women’s marathon from the Olympic programme until 1984. In this context it is easy to understand running’s lack of appeal to women in the early years of Britain’s running boom, which began when the sport spread to Europe at the end of the 1970s. Women’s low engagement at this time is illustrated by the fact that the inaugural London marathon in 1981 attracted a mere 4% female participation, compared to 45% in 2018.

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<sup>20</sup> And indeed ‘he’ was more likely to be male. Women made up, for instance, only about 5% of marathon finishers at the time this quote was written according to data in Scheerder, Breedveld and Borgers, (2015: 14).

<sup>21</sup> Women often ‘gate-crashed’ and completed male marathons in the 1960s and 1970s, but were never officially recognised.

Notwithstanding uneven participation rates, running arrived as a major lifestyle sport in the US in the 1970s and in the UK in the early 1980s (see Scheerder et al. 2015). As a social practice it had attained a high level of cultural visibility and a strikingly elitist image on both sides of the Atlantic. Whether admired or ridiculed, 'The Runner' was now a widely recognised cultural type associated with particular personal and social attributes. To run had thus become a way to make a symbolically powerful statement about the kind of person one was or wanted to be; a statement about self-determination, responsibility and personal efficacy that aligned with the exhortations of biopower around self-care and the rising neoliberal values of the time.

#### **4.7 New actors in the field**

The influx of new joggers and long-distance runners had a profound impact on the cultural landscape of the sport. The traditional athletic field - the competitive space of positions, rules, rewards and hierarchy presided over by the AAA in Britain - held no appeal to many of the new-comers. Pursuing the guiding principles of athletics - speed, competition and chasing records - was irrelevant (even counterproductive) to those looking to lose weight or socialise on the hoof. As a result, the athletic *illusio* held no power over them. Paradoxically then, just as their sport was becoming more popular than ever, the traditional rulers of the field of running were losing their grip on its meaning and form. Running was becoming deinstitutionalised; it was from the media, commerce and fitness gurus that many of the new runners now took their lead. Magazine and book publishers, sports apparel manufacturers and mass participation event management companies catering to the habitus of a broad base of mostly middle-class consumers would soon come to dominate running's field of production.

By the 1980s, businesses were heavily engaged across the field of running, from sponsoring elite championships to equipping the growing legions of weekend joggers. Traditional athletic institutions, events, participants and *doxa* persisted of course, but no longer defined the sport as they had once done. Competitive athletics had become a field within a field, operating its own internal logic as before, whilst simultaneously jostling for resources and to stake out a distinctive



identity within a fiercely competitive field of production populated by businesses, entrepreneurs and running evangelists, all competing for influence and capital. Individual runners could now elect to take up a variety of positions within the space of lifestyles this contest generated. They could affiliate themselves through practices and consumption choices with the competitive field, with particular health and fitness orientations, with spiritual orientations - even with the off-the-peg identities associated with specific sports brands.

In 1983 Whannel (1983: 26) described the resentment around the waxing influence of business over sport, it having become to some 'a branch of the advertising industry' through the growing centrality of sponsorship deals and TV coverage. Since then the domination of the sporting field by commercial interests has only increased, with sponsorship money driving and shaping elite competition, and mega-brands like Nike and Adidas competing over a global market worth around \$80 billion in running shoes alone (Transparency Market Research, 2015). At the time Whannel was writing, a relatively unreconstructed tradition of 'amateur paternalism' with its roots deep in the Victorian past still clung to a powerful position in Britain, although it already seemed clear to him that its days were numbered. Many feared that unlike traditional sports administrators, the private enterprises that were displacing them in the most powerful positions in the sporting field placed the needs of money-making and the glamorous (marketable) elite over those of the masses of lesser-lights that participated closer to the base of the sporting pyramid.

Although critics of the relationship between commerce and sport have been proved right in terms of its trajectory and potentially corrupting influence<sup>22</sup>, they appear to have been pessimistic in terms of how commercialization would impact the vigour and popularity of a sport like running at the recreational level. The 'marketization' of running's field of production - its opening up to competing agents each seeking to obtain positions that maximise capital flows - has in fact multiplied the ways in which running is packaged and practised, increasing its

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, the FBI are investigating allegations that senior officials at the International Amateur Athletics Federation have been accused of taking bribes to award the 2021 World Athletics Championships to Eugene, Oregon, the base of sportswear giant, Nike.

appeal with a range of constituencies. Without being tethered to the traditional *doxa* of competitive athletics, new forms of running have been promoted, deliberately adapted to address the tastes and dispositions (*habitus*) of different social groups. Indeed, it is commercial organisations rather than the old sporting institutions that have been behind a substantial part of the growth in the profile and participation rates of running from the early eighties to today.

#### **4.8 Expansion and diversification**

In Britain and many other European countries participation in road races increased dramatically in the early 1980s. Women and ethnic minorities though, remained seriously underrepresented. This began to change for women at least in what has been called the running boom's 'second wave' (see Van Bottenburg, 2006), which began around the turn of the millennium. After a period of stagnation in the 1990s, participation increased massively in the UK and globally from around the year 2000 until today, with, for instance, marathon finishers worldwide quadrupling in this period (Scheerder, Breedveld and Bordgers, 2015). In Britain many of these new runners were women, who flocked to the sport in their hundreds of thousands, whilst male participation increased more slowly. As a result, today women represent more than 45% of the running community in England (Sport England, 2015). What longitudinal data we have regarding ethnicity is somewhat limited by low sample sizes for non-white groups, but Sport England's Active People Survey suggests that from 2005-2015 participation rates for 'white British' runners increased by about 70%, whilst 'black' runners' participation grew by less than 20% (*ibid*). The participation of 'Asian' runners increased at a similar rate to their white British counterparts, but this was from a much lower base. Overall, white British participation increased at almost two-and-a-half times the rate of ethnic minority groups during this period. This suggests a 'whitening' as well as feminising of participation in recent years. Running's second wave also saw an increase in older runners, with participation rates more than doubling for runners over 55, but there is no suggestion of increasing diversity from a socioeconomic point of view. The little reliable data we have on this topic suggests that if anything, running became *more* elitist in England during this period: Between 2005 and 2015 participation by the working-

class (NS-SEC 5-8) increased at only half the rate of the increase in middle-class (NS-SEC 1-4) runners (Sport England, 2015).

Today there are well over two million regular<sup>23</sup> runners in England alone (see Spiers et al. 2015). Because of their number and their affluence, they contribute to a field through which a huge volume of economic capital flows. Inevitably this has continued to stimulate commercial interest, with individuals and organisations that manage to position themselves as credible producers within the field able to make a fortune from the sport. The large number of entrepreneurial event organisers that have entered the field over the last twenty years have devised a wide range of new formats aimed at resonating with the habitus of specific groups of runners. This has resulted in a diversified field from which runners can pick and choose according to their tastes and economic resources. Developments include the proliferation of races of all kinds, from traditional road races through to multi-day adventure races in deserts or jungles. Parkrun, which organises hundreds of social ‘timed runs’ at 9am every Saturday across the UK, has proved exceptionally successful by offering an unintimidating route into the sport to new runners. Seemingly in an effort to appeal to the habitus of a younger, social media friendly generation, spectacular looking mud and obstacle races have grown into a global phenomenon over the last decade. Hundreds of thousands of people each year (see Askwith, 2015) pay fees of close to £100 per race to charge around muddy obstacle courses peppered with scary looking (and photogenic), but ultimately perfectly safe obstacles, all overseen by squads of shouty marshals.

Reminding us that the new variety in running offers opportunities to challenge as well as to reflect the values that initially inspired its growth, some obstacle races – with their valorisation of teamwork and strength as well as their glitz and razzmatazz - appear designed specifically to appeal to the habitus of groups that have hitherto been ignored by running’s traditional institutions that favoured the stoical, self-sufficient reserve of the archetypal privileged white male for so long. Weedon (2016), however, presents a slightly different argument, suggesting that obstacle races represent an attempt to counter the damaging impacts on body

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<sup>23</sup> At least once per week.

and soul of the 'over-civilization' of modern society. Here the 'civilized' and emotionally contained find an outlet for their suppressed primal needs. A similar interpretation of escape could also be applied to explain the increase in middle-class and, particularly, well-educated professionals' involvement in the rural forms of running we opened this history with. Over the last twenty years or so fell-running has transformed from a rural, working-class sport into a distinctive weekend leisure activity for highly educated city dwellers (see, for instance, Askwith, 2004). Atkinson (2010) argues that many fell-runners are motivated by a desire to escape from a rational, goal-oriented world into an unstructured natural environment of meaning beyond measurement. This appears suggestive of Bourdieu's account of how within the middle-class some groups (especially those low in economic capital but high in cultural capital) search for distinction in ways that distance them from the (neoliberal) values of the economically powerful. This possible link between cultural capital and the desire to seek a 'deeper meaning' in running may also be manifest in much contemporary writing on running, with books like Murakami's (2009) *What I Talk About when I Talk about Running*, Askwith's (2004) *Feet in the Clouds*, Rowlands' (2013) *Running with Pack* and Young's (2014) *How to Think about Exercise* amongst others emphasising the value of running as an escape from the pressures and expectations of the hectic modern world.

Indeed, the burgeoning literature on running (a congested and competitive field in itself) reflects the contemporary diversity in ways of both doing and thinking about running, as well as the high cultural capital of runners (see Wright, 2006 on the relationship between cultural capital and reading). There are books about running history, running pre-history, autobiographies of famous athletes, and books about improving your performance, appearance, running style and nutrition. There are books that focus on the psychology of running, books that espouse a philosophy of running, books that decry lost worlds of running and books that romanticise running in particular environments such as in mountains, on beaches or in forests. Running is packaged as an adventure experience, a competitive sport, a health and fitness exercise, as something akin to meditation, and as a panacea for mental and physical ills. By attaching a range of different

infrastructures, rules, philosophies, images and ideas, running has been able to develop a huge cultural range.

#### **4.9 The influence of technology**

In recent years wearable technologies have become increasingly popular with recreational runners. GPS watches track calories burnt, distances run, ascent and descent, heart rates, speeds, and even weather conditions. This data can then be published to community websites and social media (notably, Strava) where runners can compete and compare with others. The use of this kind of technology transforms each run into what Schechner (1985: 36) calls a 'twice behaved behaviour', a performance with two lives, one in the doing and another the record it leaves. In such 'monitored performances', Hall, Monahan and Reeves (2016) argue, these two aspects shape one another. Clearly the 'doing' shapes the record it leaves behind, but the fact of being recorded (and especially because the record is made visible to others) also shapes the 'meaning, power, form, or value' (154) of the behaviour itself. And it is the potential of this monitoring to shape individual behaviour that provides wearable self-monitoring technologies with much of their appeal in an era of health responsibilisation. They provide a tool to 'help consumers navigate the field of everyday choice making, and [to] better control... their health' (Schüll, 2016: 317). And as such, they can be understood as implicated in the wider 'lifestyle network' (Mayes, 2016) of agents, institutions and technologies – of micro-powers - that facilitate governmentality, with population health regulated via norms generated and policed through the voluntary sharing of personal data, and both peer-to-peer 'coveillance' and internalised self-regulation.

Looked at from a Bourdieusian perspective, the narrative of healthism, which emphasises the role of *choice* in health outcomes misrecognises the structural causes of health inequalities, particularly those around social class. In this context, wearable technologies that enable the physical capital (quantified as data) and healthy behaviours of recreational runners to be performed more visibly than ever before provide a new medium through which runners' social status can be asserted. Every lonely run is converted into a public performance; every heart beat a tiny but public indicator of underlying bodily health. And all

add up – when filtered through the pervasive *doxa* of healthism - to an expression of self-efficacy, discipline and good citizenship, helping to reinforce the relationship between these qualities and the middle-class who have the time and resources to participate in the sport and to afford the expensive equipment to monitor and publicise the fact.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

Over the course of this chapter I have provided a historical outline and sociological analysis of the development of the field of running, from its roots in rustic festivities to the highly diversified, commercialised and high-tech sporting market place of today. I have shown how it is possible to make sense of this history in terms of changing attitudes and orientations towards the body's behaviour, appearance and health. I have also shown how inequalities and the contestation of power within the field of running, as well as changing demographics, social and political circumstances outside the sport can help to explain why, how and when these changes occurred.

I have drawn attention to the important roles of race, and especially of class and gender as fault lines and battlegrounds within running. Largely, this can be traced back to the efforts of a clique of privileged men in Victorian times, who fought to gain control of running and convert it into a single integrated field aligned with their own values and principles. Their efforts to build and maintain control over the field and to enforce their vision of running and society on the entire running community resulted in the marginalisation of the working-class and women for many years. And the dominant version of running they created – its myths, images, institutions, meanings and principles – retains significant symbolic power today.

A second and even more important shift (from the point of view of modern recreational participants) in the meaning and practice of running centred on the 'running boom' of the 1970s. At this time new forms of the sport emerged in response to an increasing focus on bodily health and wellbeing, particularly amongst middle-class Americans and West Europeans. These new ways of running also placed less emphasis on competition (although this remained

important for many) and athleticism, and greatly increased the number of people taking part in the sport, although middle-class white men still dominated. I have linked the take-off of running as a mass participation sport to healthism – the policing of norms around self-care via governmentality – and, related to this, to the increasing centrality of self-entrepreneurship as a touchstone of personal success under neoliberal socioeconomic conditions. Today, under the influence of commercial forces that have sought to broaden its appeal, running has become increasingly diverse, with track athletics, road running, trail and adventure running, obstacle course races, gym treadmills and fitness jogging amongst a growing list of forms. However, despite some significant improvements in equality of access in recent times, gender, class and race remain powerful explanatory factors with regards to both the ways people participate in running, and whether they participate at all.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (2010) suggested it is often possible to relate variations in modern forms of a sport to different periods in its development. And indeed, the above analysis helps us to understand how the different meanings attached to modern forms of doing running can be understood as (in part) results of the historical moments and processes from which they emerged. As we shall see over the coming chapters, these variations in meaning retain their power to shape the appeal of different forms of the sport and to determine the social identities they help support down to today.

## Chapter 5: Findings I

# Running by numbers

### 5.1 Running in context

One of the key differences between this and previous sociological work on running (e.g. Abbas, 2004; Breedveld, Scheerder and Borgers, 2015; Nettleton, 2013) is that rather than conceiving of running as a single sport or addressing a single running sub-culture, it takes as its point of departure a recognition of the sport's fundamentally heterogeneous nature. I argue that variants of running have their own distinctive histories, cultural meanings and access requirements, and as such act as opportunities to perform and reinforce a range of quite different social identities. Research that fails to recognise this diversity risks painting an impoverished, low-resolution picture of running's cultural landscape, with a great loss of important information, particularly with regards to its most culturally distinctive variants. So, rather than conceiving of running as single, unified sporting culture, it is better imagined as a large tree with many branches, all sharing a common trunk but reaching in different social and cultural directions. Before we begin to examine these branches in detail, however, it is instructive to situate the sport as a whole in its wider social context.

In *Distinction* and elsewhere, Bourdieu (2010, 1978) asserted that sporting practice provides one of the clearest manifestations of the conditioned dispositions, inclinations and beliefs that make up the habitus. To begin to understand the ways in which habitus is performed or projected through running we need to have a picture of where the sport sits in social space, both in absolute demographic terms and also relative to comparable alternatives. So, below I start by mapping the wider social space of sports and situating un-deconstructed running within it. Through this we can gain an appreciation of the social centre of gravity of running, as well as clues to its broad cultural meanings, in relation to which the distinctiveness of some of the forms we will explore later become meaningful. Furthermore, if as Bourdieu argues with his notion of the



homology of fields, different fields and sub-fields are often structured according to the same logic - the same opposition between the tastes of dominant and dominated groups – understanding the structuring of the space of sports as a whole will provide useful insights for interpreting the microcosm of practices within running I will be describing later.

## **5.2 Secondary Data Analysis**

### **5.2.1 Mapping the social space of sport**

Pursuing Bourdieu's thinking, researchers have attempted to describe the field of sports in various national contexts, for example Stempel (2005) in the USA, Moens and Scheerder (2004) in Belgium, Skille (2007) in Norway and Warde (2006) in the UK. As background for this study, however, none of these come close to the combination of geographic relevance, size and scope achievable through a secondary analysis of data from Sport England's (2016) Active People Survey (APS). This annual survey collects detailed responses about the sport and active leisure activities of a national sample of over 170,000 people aged 14 and over. Its data provides the opportunity to generate an unparalleled picture of sporting practice in England, and is available for researchers to download and analyse independently. Its wide scope and random sampling mean that it offers robust and large samples of participants in a wide range of popular sports and activities, enabling a comparison of their social profiles. However, the data is much weaker when it comes to very low participation rate practices, where more targeted sampling would be needed to obtain a useful volume of data. Taking this into account I have selected 28 sports and physical recreations to display in figures 2, 3 and 4 below, each of which has at least 200 respondents (some, including running, have several thousand) indicating a minimum of once-per-week participation. The only exceptions are Military Fitness and Weight Lifting, which have fewer respondents, but are included because of their relevance later.

The APS data suggests an adult once per week participation rate for running of 4.9% in 2015-2016, making it the second most popular sport in England after swimming (5.7%), and narrowly ahead of cycling (4.4%). This equates to around two million regular runners in England alone. But who are these people? And

how do they compare socially to participants in other sports? Figure 2 plots the positions of running and a range of other sporting and active leisure activities in terms of gender participation balance (percentage of male participants, x-axis) and mean age of participants (y-axis). On the x-axis, sports appearing to the left of the red vertical line have a higher proportion of female participants, with those on the right having more males. The further towards either end of this axis the heavier this imbalance is. The horizontal red line represents the sample mean age for the sample, which includes many people who do not participate in any sport, hence its relatively high position on the chart.

**Key to figures 2-4:** *Dance Ex.:* Dance exercise; *Zumba:* a hybrid aerobics and dance exercise; *Spinning:* stationary exercise bike classes; *Bootcamp and Military fitness:* military style exercise classes, often outside; *Circuits:* high intensity workout involving numerous aerobic, body weight and resistance exercises; *Gym (solo):* exercising at gym without a personal trainer; *Rugby U.:* rugby union

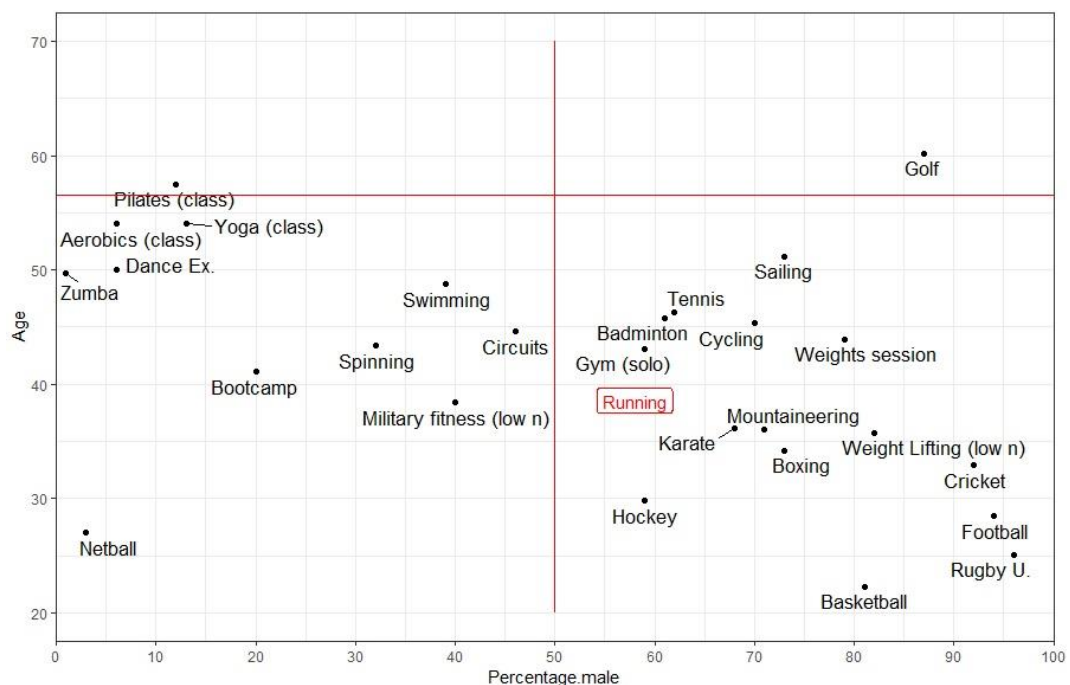


Figure 2: Sports and physical recreations by mean age and percentage of male participants.

### 5.2.2 Interpreting sports participation choices

It is clear from figure 2 that both gender and age act as powerful structuring factors in the space of physical recreation. Mean ages for participants run from 22 (basketball) to 60 (golf) and whilst Zumba and netball (to the far left of the chart) are practised almost exclusively by women, the opposite is true of rugby union and to a lesser extent, football (to the far right). These clear differences in terms of who does which activity are reflected in popular stereotypes associated with different activities. Golf is sometimes pejoratively (but accurately, it seems) described as an 'old man's sport', rugby a 'man's game', cricket a game for 'gentlemen' and the yoga studio the domain of 'yummy mummies' (see Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). Stereotypes such as these reinforce the social facts that generate them through the effect of homophily – whereby new participants are attracted to sports populated by people they see as similar to themselves (see McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). But according to Bourdieu there is more to this sporting segregation than birds of a feather flocking together. First, the intrinsic nature of the activities themselves and the cultures that surround them are freighted with meanings and characteristics that attract or repel different social groups depending on their particular tastes, norms and ideals. Secondly, factors such as differences between social groups in terms of available free-time or money can also restrict freedom of choice. And finally, differences in age and gender are linked to physical differences in strength, stamina and injury proneness – i.e. physical capital - that can also influence which sports appeal or are practical for different people. Below we will take a brief look at some of the factors that might help to explain the structuring of overall sports and active leisure participation with respect to age and gender.

### 5.2.3 Age

Focusing on the vertical axis it is possible to make a number of observations from figure 2 that bear on the role of age in determining sporting practice:

1. Overall, active leisure activities are dominated by younger people. The horizontal red line shows that only two activities, Pilates and golf, have participation bases with an average age above that of the sample

mean. This suggests that many older people are not involved in any form of active leisure more vigorous than walking;

2. Team sports attract much younger participants than individual sports. Activities that require one or no partners such as yoga, tennis or golf attract amongst the oldest participant bases;
3. Sports involving physical contact, violence and direct competition, whether team sports like rugby or individual sports like karate, attract younger participants;
4. Activities focused on managing weight, appearance or fitness become more popular as age increases towards the sample mean, and the mean ages for these activities cluster between the late-30s and mid-50s.

How can we explain these observations? In terms of access to physical infrastructure, young people who are still in education have greater opportunities to practise team sport, because of the availability of institutional (school, university) sports infrastructure, and because they are likely to have many friends and acquaintances and plenty of free time. As people get older, work longer hours, commute and accrue responsibilities at home, leisure activities need to be taken whenever they can. Organising a large group of players to be free at the same time for a sport such as football or netball becomes increasingly difficult. Individual sports, on the other hand, have the benefits of being easier to fit in and of being less contingent on coordinating many people's schedules.

As we age, we experience a loss of some forms of physical capital. We slow down and lose muscle mass, and may also become more prone to injury. This can result in a loss of athletic ability that can make us less able to achieve rewards – i.e. to convert physical into symbolic capital - within some sports, particularly those requiring high levels of athleticism or physical confrontation, reducing their appeal. Changes in physical capital may also help explain the increasing participation in gym and fitness-based activities as people enter middle age. In a culture in which an attractive body and particularly slimness are highly prized (Abbas, 2004) changes in the body associated with ageing – especially in the

context of today's often sedentary working lives - can be discomfiting. Putting on weight and feeling unfit can be interpreted in the light of a prevailing 'narrative of decline' that sees ageing as an entirely negative process of loss, including a gradual decivilizing of the body (Tulle, 2008). This can prompt some to engage in body management practices such as going to the gym, aerobics or jogging that help to arrest the physical aspects of this 'downhill slide' and retain as much physical capital as possible into later life (see Tulle 2007; 2008). Engagement in body management practices can also be understood as a way of performing personally and socially responsible behaviours, an increasingly important element of meaning as people age (see chapter six; Tulle, 2008).

With respect to the position of running we can see that its mean participant age is located close to the lower bound of the fitness/weight management practices, at just under 40 years old. This is significantly older than any of the team sports included here (perhaps due to its relatively low infrastructure requirements as well as increased desire to manage diminishing physical capital), but six and nine years younger than the comparable sports of cycling and swimming respectively. This difference could be explained by the fact that running is a high-impact sport, whereas swimming and cycling are low-impact. Perhaps resulting perceptions of running as more demanding on joints or bones, or more frequent injuries put off older runners, who turn instead to the pool or saddle.

#### **5.2.4 Gender**

Switching focus to the gender (horizontal) axis, there is an even more striking contrast between activities at its extremities than we found for age, representing the extreme gender polarisation of some forms of physical recreation. This supports Warde's (2006) assertion that gender is the single biggest factor structuring sporting practice in the UK. From figure 2 we can observe that:

1. Activities that take place indoors are more popular with women; outdoor and adventure sports are more popular with men;
2. All the activities with a preponderance of female participants apart from netball are focused on weight and fitness management;
3. Competitive activities are more popular with male participants;

4. Activities carrying a higher risk of injury are more strongly associated with men;
5. The majority of female-dominated activities take place in loose groups, i.e. whilst essentially non-competitive and requiring no other participants, these activities are usually practised parallel to other people in the same class or group. None of the male-dominated activities fall into this category.

The positions of the team sports may be understood primarily as a result of institutionalised gendering of sports in physical education at school. Infrastructure and encouragement have historically been provided for rugby and football for boys, and netball for girls. The Active People Survey data takes in people from age 14, so any existing gender segregation in the sports children are encouraged to play at school is likely to have an impact here. More subtly, gender differences in how physical education is taught and experienced which are informed by and help to reinforce wider ideas about masculinity and femininity (see Paechter, 2003) also help to structure choice of sports, even if institutionalised segregation is not in place. Outside and after schooling the gendered meanings of these practices would, of course, remain in place, as tastes and competences (i.e. habitus) have been firmly entrenched.

Another important factor appears to be a gender difference in priorities around body shape management. The activities explicitly or primarily focused on burning calories and hence losing weight all appear in the female-dominated portion of the chart. Activities focused on building large muscles appear in the male half. Intermediate or mixed activities such as 'gym', 'circuits' and 'military fitness' are all relatively close to the middle of the chart. This can be understood as a result of well-documented differences in body shape ideals between genders (explored in chapters six and eight). For women, variations on the theme of slimness have been dominant aesthetic ideals since at least the 1960s (Howson, 2013; also see chapter four). In recent decades though, as women's economic power has risen, the male body has increasingly become an object of gaze and evaluation too. As a result, men have become more conscious of the shape and status of their own bodies, currently judged in relation to a lean and muscular ideal as unattainable

to most men as female ideals are to most women (see Coffey, 2016; Howson, 2013). It is on women though, that body-image pressures are the most intense, and on whom the burden of body insecurity falls most heavily, leading to higher levels of body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety, and greater self-criticism (see a review of psychological problems relating to body image in Calogero and Thompson, 2010). The especially strong effects of this high valuation of idealised body shape in women goes a long way to explaining the fact that all the highly feminised activities in figure 2 apart from netball are essentially body-shaping and calorie-burning activities. The fact that these activities all take place indoors in controlled, private spaces is perhaps indicative of the intense awareness women have of the judgemental, objectifying gaze they would be subject to in more public places. In this sense the availability of these physical/infrastructure elements of practice are essential to encouraging female participation.

The preponderance of competitive sports in the masculinised portion of the chart may be explained by the fact that 'Competitiveness, a combination of the calculative and the combative... is central to hegemonic masculinity' (Donaldson, 1993: 655). Being competitive is one of the characteristics of the dominant form of masculinity in our culture, and its negation a trait of emphasised femininity. This is a polarisation – a gendering of habitus - imbibed from play in childhood (McGuffey and Rich, 1999), and reinforced in adult life. The result is that men may feel more at home in competitive sports, and women prefer those that avoid direct contests – at least in a sporting sense. According to Krane (2001), women who transgress this gender order can be subjected to sexist and heterosexist discrimination, a form of boundary work that helps to ensure the relationship between competitiveness and masculinity remains in place. The avoidance of appearing competitive may help explain why many of the feminised activities on the chart take place in loose groups – with others present, but participating in parallel rather than engaging in competition with each other.

Another characteristic often associated with hegemonic masculinity is risk-taking (Morrissey, 2008; Lyng, 2005). From a young age, boys learn to become risk-takers to avoid being designated a 'wimp' or 'sissy' (Morrissey, 2008). This valorisation of risk in men's early social environment is absorbed as habitus and

carried into later life. Risky sports such as boxing, rugby, sailing or mountaineering offer a space in which to perform fearlessness in otherwise conventional, well-managed lives. Adventure sports, which often take place in 'wild' environments, pit lone participants against the vicissitudes of nature itself, fulfilling the criteria of riskiness as well as a further attribute of the idealised hegemonic male, namely, self-reliance (see Mahalik et al. 2003). It seems likely therefore, that the lower proportion of women participating in adventure sports such as mountaineering and sailing in figure 2 is in part attributable to an indisposition to risk-taking. However, studies have also pointed to greater practical barriers to participation in adventure sports for women. In particular, the unequal division of caring labour means that women often have greater and more inflexible commitments to children and other dependents and are thus less able to allocate large blocks of spare time to participate in adventure sports, which often entail long periods spent in remote locations (see Dilley and Scranton, 2010).

As with the age axis, running sits fairly centrally on the gender axis in figure 2. This is partly a function of its inherently low competence and practical barriers (only requiring a pair of serviceable trainers and the motivation to step out of the front door). Therefore, gender differences in past experiences of sport and access to resources may be less strongly felt than in some other sports. It may also reflect running's flexibility. It is a highly effective fat-burning and conditioning exercise which can be practised alone or with a small, supportive group; it can also be a highly competitive sport practised in remote and wild locations. So perhaps running's relatively neutral position with regards to gender is misleading. The catch-all 'running' may smooth over and obscure a highly gendered microcosm of sub-sports that allow a diversity of sporting – and gender - identities to be expressed. We will explore this possibility later.

### **5.2.5 Ethnicity**

Missing from this discussion so far has been the topic of ethnicity. According to the APS data, running is practiced by 5.3% of people identifying as 'white British' and 6.9% of those identifying as 'white other'. The higher rate for 'white other' people here might be related to their significantly lower average age than 'white



British' in the survey (47 years compared to 57 years). But both figures are significantly higher than for those identifying as 'black' (3.7%), 'Asian' (2.4%) or 'mixed race' (4.1%) in the survey *despite* their younger average ages of 39, 42 and 38 years respectively. Indeed, looking just at people aged 35-44 the participation rate for 'white British' people rises to 10.2%, compared to 9.3% for 'white other' and 5.8% for 'black and minority ethnic groups'. Running then, appears to be substantially more popular amongst white people than it does amongst minority ethnic groups.

### **5.2.6 Disability**

Perhaps unsurprisingly given running's physically demanding nature, runners in the APS survey report a much lower incidence of disability than the wider sample. 12% of runners report having a 'long-standing illness, disability of infirmity' compared to 34% of the whole survey sample. In part this large difference can be understood as an artefact of the greater number of older people in the wider sample, but even if we limit the analysis to respondents under the age of 60 a clear difference remains, with 11% of runners compared to 24% of the entire sample reporting some form of disability.

There is, however, reason to be cautious about these figures. The APS suggests around a quarter of working age people have some kind of disability, yet government statistics offer a much lower figure for working age adults, at 16% (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014). It is possible that part of this difference might be accounted for in the slight variation in the wording of the survey question on disability, which, in the DWP statistics, substitutes the word 'impairment' for 'infirmity', but this seems unlikely to account for such a large difference. It must be assumed that this has more to do with differences in the sampling techniques or classificatory systems deployed in the two surveys.

### **5.2.7 The influence of occupational class**

Another important structuring variable for analyses of social space is class. Later, in the analysis of the data collected from the Big Running Survey, we will be able to look at a number of components of this construct separately, namely education, income and occupation type. Unfortunately, the APS dataset available

for download does not include education or income data. It does, however, contain detailed information about respondents' occupations, categorised according to the National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification (NS-SEC). In this scheme, categories 1-2 include managerial and professional occupations, and categories 5-8 include lower supervisory, technical, semi-routine and routine occupations as well as those who have never worked or are long-term unemployed (see Rose, Pevalin and O'Reilly, 2005). Figure 3 shows the percentage of each sport's participants in each of these groupings (data sorted by high status participants in the chart at the top, low status in the chart on the bottom). Figure 4 shows the ratio of participants in the higher (NS-SEC 1-2) grouping to the lower (NS-SEC 5-8) grouping by sport. The red vertical line indicates the sample mean. Running is indicated by the stars.

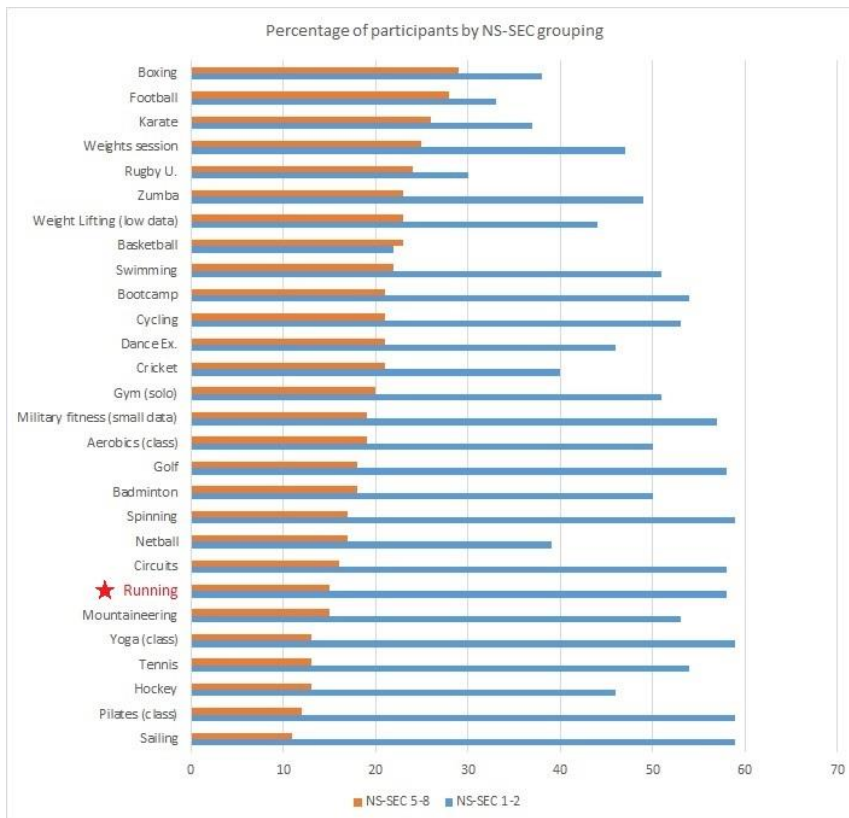
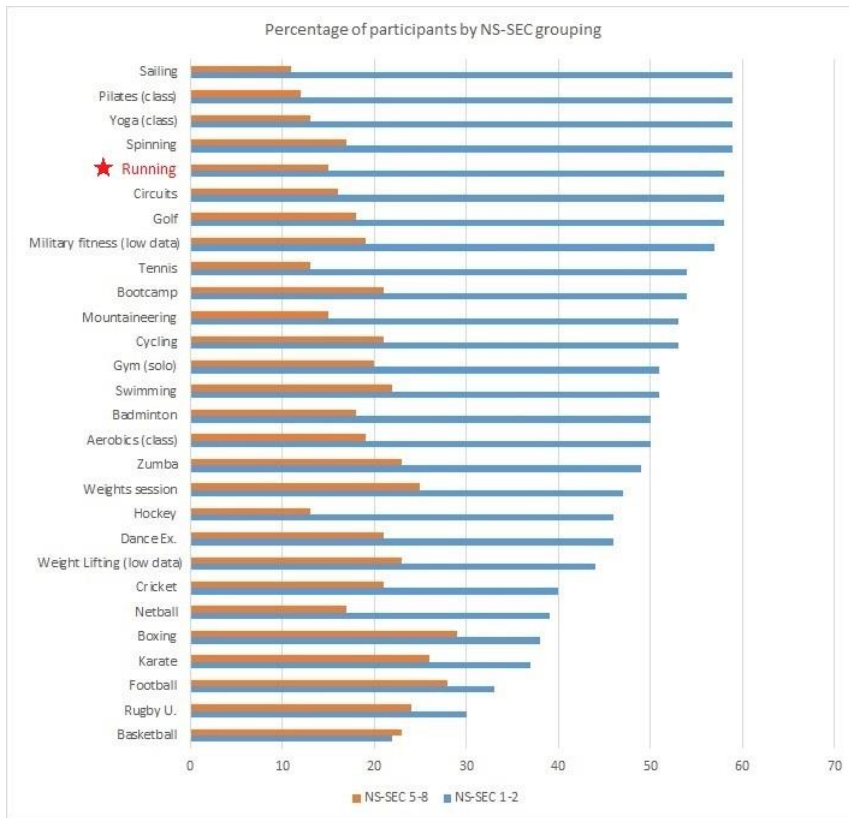
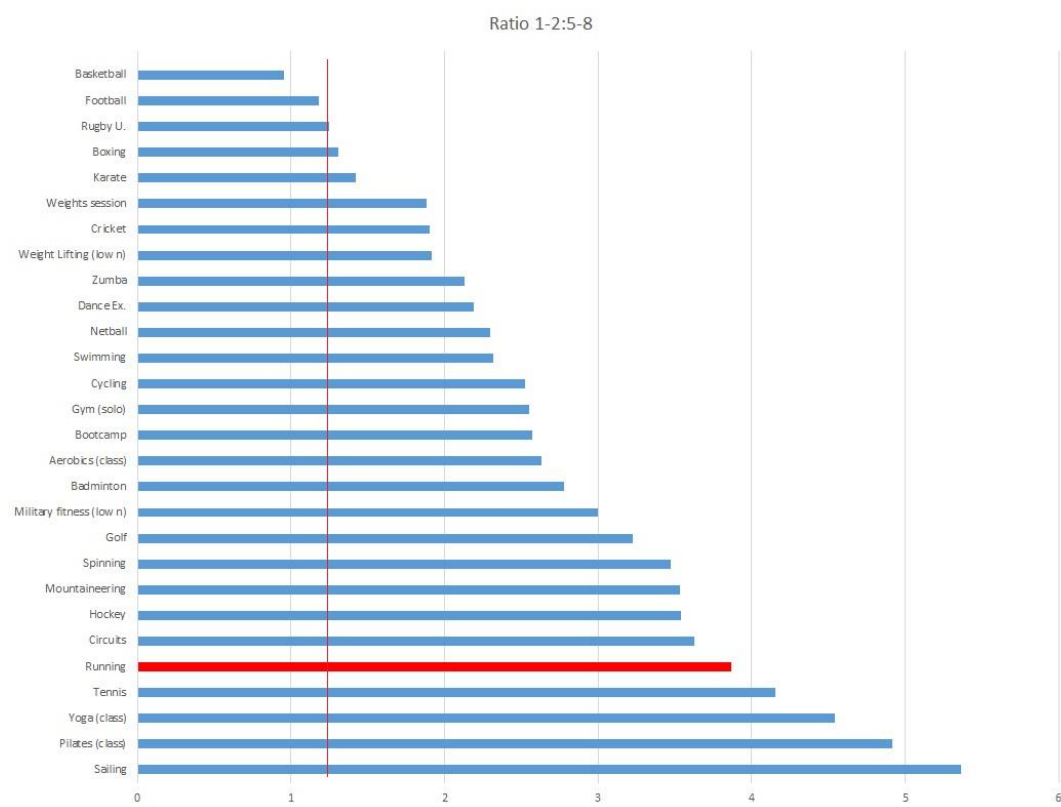


Figure 3: Percentage of NS-SEC 1-2 and NS-SEC 5-8 participants in sports in Active People Survey data. Sorted by percentage of NS-SEC 1-2 participants (top), NS-SEC 5-8 (bottom).



*Figure 4: Sports showing ratio of NS-SEC 1-2 to NS-SEC 5-8 participants in Active People Survey data.*

### **5.2.8 Interpreting sports participation choices by occupational class**

It has been argued that Bourdieusian analyses of cultural consumption based on the premise of the homology of fields are no longer adequate to comprehend the structuring of contemporary lifestyle choices (see Atkinson, 2011). An influential alternative perspective, the univore-omnivore model, suggests that dominant socioeconomic status is expressed through knowing eclecticism rather than a preference for specific high-status goods or practices (see Peterson, 2005; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005; Widdop, Cutts and Jarvie, 2016). A glance at figures 3 and 4 suggests that as far as active leisure is concerned, even if there is omnivorousness amongst the higher status individuals it is not sufficient to erode the highly distinctive socioeconomic signatures – and hence the meanings - of different practices. Perhaps, in keeping with Bourdieu (2010), the ways we use and view our bodies are so deeply ingrained through our social experiences - so central to who we are - that excursions into practices that transgress group norms are more strongly resisted than in other, less embodied areas of taste. Certainly, the APS data strongly refutes Warde’s (2006: 115) assertion that ‘with

the exception of gender differences, the choice of sport is not highly symbolically significant', and contributes to a body of research that argues that the idea of omnivorousness in cultural consumption has been over-played (see Tampubolon, 2010; Atkinson, 2011).

Between them, figures 3 and 4 suggest a number of patterns:

1. Across almost all activities, higher occupational class individuals are more likely to participate than lower occupational class individuals.
2. Team sports have a much higher proportion of lower occupational class participants than individual sports, excepting combat sports.
3. Muscle-building gym activities attract relatively high numbers of lower occupational class participants.
4. Expensive sports like sailing, golf and tennis attract low numbers of low occupational class participants.
5. Activities taking place in natural environments (mountaineering, sailing) attract amongst the highest percentages of high occupational class individuals and have low participation rates for those of lower occupational class.

Overall, these up-to-date findings offer strong evidence for the continuing relevance of assertions Bourdieu made about French sporting taste 40 years ago in *Distinction* and other writings (Bourdieu, 2010; 1978). Beyond the influence of economic and occupational differences, which favour middle-class participation in some sports because of their financial costs and demands on time (e.g. sailing, golf), several the class-based dispositional factors described by Bourdieu fit neatly with the patterns we see in participation preferences.

Bourdieu argued that the ways our bodies look and move, and how we prefer to use them, are deeply inscribed on our habitus. Bodies are therefore powerful outward symbols of social position, and thus a form of capital in themselves. According to Bourdieu (2010; 1978) working-class people tend to see bodies through a lens of instrumentality. They favour male bodies that are strong and sturdy – fit to work hard and be physically dominant. Large muscles and large appetites are valued. Sports that emphasise muscularity and power are thus

preferred, and especially those that offer an opportunity for trials of strength through direct – often violent – physical competition. Conversely, Bourdieu argued, professional/managerial groups tend towards quite different dispositions. Here bodies are seen as ‘ends in themselves’, so sport is often directed at improving their appearance and function (discussed in the context of healthism in the next chapter). Slim, toned, graceful and thus ‘healthy-looking’ bodies are preferred for both genders of the middle-class (Abbas, 2004), so sports that generate these kinds of physiques are preferred. Competition – where it exists – is usually non-physical and highly codified. This framework maps neatly onto figures 3 and 4, with direct competition and muscle-building sports popular with working-class respondents, and non-competitive, ‘toning and shaping’ sports preferred by managers and professionals.

Conspicuously missing from Bourdieu’s treatment are, of course, the bodies of working-class women. Other writers have argued that young working-class women’s bodies are defined by their sexuality (Stanger, 2013), and later, as subordinated to an ideal of good motherhood (Criado, 2010). Skeggs (2005: 967) suggests that working-class women’s bodies are regularly associated with fatness, which in turn suggests these women are ‘incapable of knowing how to look after themselves and others, [and that they are] irresponsible’. She has also argued that femininity is seen as a ‘property of middle-class women’ (Skeggs, 1997: 99), devaluing the bodies and conduct of their working-class counterparts. Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) describe how the media reinforce the evaluation of working-class women’s bodies as ‘abject’ through the symbolic violence meted out in make-over shows. This could suggest that part of the reason for low sports participation amongst working-class women is that, having internalised wider society’s low evaluation of their own bodies, they are less inclined to activities that put their bodies on display or into competition with others.

The characteristics of the sites at which sports and active leisure activities take place also play a role in structuring their distribution among occupational classes. Essentially, the variable at play here is exclusivity. Public playing fields or playgrounds where lower occupational class sports such as football, basketball or cricket take place have almost no barriers to access, so offer no opportunity for

the display of social distinction through their use. A step up the exclusivity ladder we find municipal sports centres, followed by private gyms, which place increasing economic barriers on entry and impose more restrictive behavioural codes. Even more exclusive are up-market members-only clubs, such as are common for golf or tennis. Here, not only are membership fees prohibitive to many, but a precise etiquette in line with middle-class values of decorum and dress is enforced (e.g. in tennis, see Deluca, 2012; Falcoux and McLeod, 2012). Remote and wild places offer another form of exclusivity through their inaccessibility, requiring money for transport and plenty of spare time to access them. Participating safely in some especially dangerous natural environments such as at sea (sailing) or on rocky cliffs (mountaineering) further requires a long-term (and expensive) investment in training and equipment that places access well beyond the reach of many.

The occupational class-based opposition between team and individual sports visible in figures 3 and 4 can also be understood in Bourdieusian terms. He argues that the 'values and virtues demanded' by team sports 'combine all of the features which repel the dominant class', including 'strength, endurance, violence, "sacrifice", docility and submission to collective discipline – so contrary to bourgeois "role distance" – and the exaltation of competition' (Bourdieu, 2010: 212). Again, the data fits Bourdieu's characterisation of class-based differences in habitus, and chimes with other work linking individualism with the middle-class (e.g. Burns, 1992) and the persistence of collective identities in the modern working-class (MacKenzie et al. 2006). Running might be considered the individual sport *par excellence* – an activity that can be practised alone and in which individual achievement or goals are emphasised. Even competition in running need not take place in the presence of other people, with performances rendered directly comparable through accurate timing and measurement and made visible via websites and social media. In this sense running would seem to offer a perfect fit with the middle-class disposition towards individualism.

And indeed, unlike for the age and gender variables, the position of running with regards to occupational class is quite distinctive. It has amongst the highest proportions of NS-SEC 1-2 participants and proportionally few NS-SEC 5-8

participants. This even though running has few intrinsic barriers to participation – cost of entry is very low, and it can be practised in virtually any environment. In fact, running has a significantly higher ratio of high to low status participants than comparable activities like cycling and swimming, and by these metrics is most similar to traditionally high-status activities like tennis, yoga and mountaineering. These findings, although perhaps surprising, are in line with other work on the social profile of running and make sense in the light of running's close fit with key middle-class dispositions towards individualism and the management of the body.

### **5.2.9 Which middle-class?**

We can use the evidence above to characterise running as a 'middle-class' sport, but can we be more specific? The term 'middle-class' is – like 'running' – a somewhat vague catchall, subject to a range of interpretations and covering many distinctive groups, and as such has been avoided by many writers, who favour alternative and more specific labels such as 'creative class' (Florida, 2002) or 'professional middle-class' (Ehrenreich, 1990) or who identify a range of sectors of the middle-class such as 'established', 'technical' and 'affluent workers' (Savage et al. 2015). So far, I have defined the middle-class as NS-SEC 1 and 2, but the APS data offers scope to explore this further. We can divide this group into a number of sub categories, allowing us to compare the relative levels of participation in running for different occupational groups within the middle-class. This is depicted in table 2, which allows us to compare the percentage of respondents in each of several occupational groups who run to the percentage in the APS sample as a whole.

The table shows, first, that aside from the small number of employers in large organisations<sup>24</sup> (L1), running is more popular with all parts of the middle-class than one would expect under the null hypothesis. But it also suggests that the relationship between socioeconomic status and running is maintained even *within* the middle-class, with high status sub-groups such as higher managers and higher professionals engaging in particularly large numbers relative to their size

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<sup>24</sup> Only 29 runners fell into this category.



(indicated in dark green). Bourdieu states that the first part of any field analysis should be to 'analyze the position of the field viz-a-viz the field of power' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 104), in other words to locate the field within overall social space. What this evidence points to is that whilst running is associated with almost all parts of the middle-class as understood as NS-SEC 1-2, a more nuanced view would emphasise its especially strong relationship with the uppermost ranks of the professional and managerial class, a socially powerful group high in both economic and cultural capital.

NS-SEC sub category	% of full APS sample	% of runners in APS	Ratio of running participation % / population %
L1: Employers in large organisations	0.4	0.3	0.88
L2: Higher managerial	4.8	8.9	1.85
L3.1: Higher professionals (traditional) - employees	4.1	7.6	1.84
L3.2: Higher professionals (new) - employees	1.2	2.3	1.97
L4.1: Lower professionals and higher technical (traditional) - employees	13.7	17.4	1.27
L4.2: Lower professionals and higher technical (new) - employees	0.6	0.6	1.17
L5: Lower managerial	6.9	8.0	1.15

*Table 2: Proportions of APS sample and running sample within APS in different occupational groups within the 'middle-class'.*

## 5.3 Primary data analysis

### 5.3.1 Introducing the Big Running Survey

The APS data we have looked at so far provides unparalleled sample size and representativeness across the English<sup>25</sup> population. This is a great strength when taking a broad view of the social terrain of sport in England, and is strongly suggestive of wider UK trends, it also presents problems for more fine-grained analyses. In the case of running, whilst an effort has been made to pick up on some of the sport's variants in the APS, their sample sizes are small, and much variety is glossed over. In terms of this study, we are approaching the limit of the APS data's usefulness.

At this stage then, it is time to introduce my primary data, collected by targeting runners specifically, using a sampling strategy designed to collect reasonable quantities of data from a wide range of communities of practice within running. The Big Running Survey (BRS) includes data from 2,637 runners from all parts of the UK (not just England, as per the APS). Comparing key demographic means from the BRS data to those of the running sample in the APS data (see table 3), we can see that the two datasets are broadly comparable<sup>26</sup>. Differences could have arisen both because the APS data takes in a much larger proportion of non-competitive runners, and because the APS targeted people down to the age of 14 rather than just adults. Differences in sampling methods also certainly played a role in shaping the sample too: The BRS was undertaken by self-selecting participants online, whereas the APS respondents were gathered through unsolicited telephone contact (see Sport England, 2013). As such it is likely that the APS figures are more representative of the running population as a whole, but the BRS data provides significantly larger sub-samples for studying variation *within* running, and a higher proportion of engaged and competitive runners, as demonstrated in table 4. Here we can see a comparison between the two datasets of sample sizes for organised race participation in the last 12 months.

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<sup>25</sup> The APS dataset, being collected by Sport England, only covers England itself.

<sup>26</sup> See Glossary in appendix A for definitions of the running sub-sports listed.

The combined sub-samples add up to more than the total sample size because runners were able to select more than one race type.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>APS</b>	<b>BRS</b>
Gender – percentage female	52%	60%
Mean age	40	43
NS-SEC 1-2	58%	58%
NS-SEC 5-8	15%	10%
NS-SEC 1-2 : NS-SEC 5-8 ratio	3.9	5.8

*Table 3: key features of APS and BRS runners data, a comparison.*

Race type in last 12 months	APS sample size	BRS sample size	Notes
All running combined (including non-racers).	8829	2637	
Road racing	1768	2016	BRS further differentiated by distance raced.
Track athletics	248	247	APS total includes some field athletes (category not broken down). BRS further differentiated by distance raced.
Cross-country/ trail race/parkrun	527	1911	Ambiguity in classification here <sup>27</sup>
Ultra-marathon	103	272	
Fell-racing	37	490	
Obstacle course racing	45	380	BRS figure combines the closely related 'mud races' category.
Orienteering	45	227	
Triathlon	264	292	

*Table 4: APS and BRS sample sizes compared. Figures are for race participation in the last 12 months.*

### **5.3.2 A blind spot: Ethnicity**

I have already mentioned that the APS data shows much higher running participation rates amongst 'white' people than it does amongst other ethnic

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<sup>27</sup> Judging by the high participation rate in the APS data, 'cross-country' appears to have been interpreted by respondents as something like 'off-road races', not in the more technical way referring to competitive, club-based winter season racing on specialist courses. It appears to be closest conceptually to the BRS categories 'trail race' and 'parkrun', a combination of which it is compared to here.

groups. In fact, the APS suggests that 93.7% of runners identify as 'white'. If the BRS had achieved a similar ratio of minority ethnic respondents this would have provided a small sample of 'non-white' runners from which to draw statistical conclusions, at about 165 respondents *spread across all 'non-white' groups*. Unfortunately, though, relatively few minority ethnic respondents completed my survey (possible reasons for which were explored in chapter three). In fact, in the BRS data 97% of respondents identified as 'white', resulting in data on just 80 or so 'non-white' runners. As such, it is difficult to make any strong assertions about ethnicity and running other than to reinforce the APS finding that running is a very 'white' sport. My discussion of ethnicity in the findings that follow (that largely focus on distinctions *within* running) will, therefore, be necessarily limited.

### **5.3.3 Disability**

Only 5% of BRS respondents stated that they had a disability. The wording of this question might help account for the fact that this is a markedly lower rate than found amongst runners in the APS data (12%), which explicitly also mentions 'infirmary' and 'illness'. However, it is likely that sampling issues also play a role here. One possible explanation is the larger proportion of club runners in the BRS sample compared to the APS. The APS data suggests disabled runners are much less likely to be club members (1.8%) than non-disabled runners (4.6%), which would have the effect of reducing overall disability rates in the BRS sample.

Whichever figures one chooses to focus on, it is clear that running is dominated by the able-bodied. This appears to be especially true amongst those involved in clubs, although the BRS data suggests that disabled runners enter races at about the same rate as their non-disabled counterparts. Interestingly, the BRS data also suggests there is little variation *within* running in terms of the forms of the sport disabled people engage in. Disabled runners are as likely to participate in forms as varied as track sprinting, marathon running and fell-racing as their able-bodied counterparts. In this sense, it appears that provided a disability does not prevent participation in running completely, it is not usually an important factor in determining which kind of running someone gets involved in.

## 5.4 Mapping the field of running

The central analytical tool I will use to map the internal structure of running using the BRS data is multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). This technique was popularised by Bourdieu for both its facility in managing and displaying the relationships between large numbers of categorical variables in a digestible way, and its neat compatibility with his field theory. MCA is a form of principle component analysis for categorical data. It calculates underlying factors that explain as much of the variance within the data as possible, and displays these as a series of two dimensional 'maps'. Individual practices and motivations are plotted onto these maps, with those positioned close together having a high level of correspondence (i.e. they are often found in the same person) in terms of the underlying dimensions included in the map, and those that are far apart having low correspondence. The dimensions of these maps represent the important ways in which groups of practices and motivations are distinguished from one another. What they mean substantively requires interpretation.

The analysis included 37 practices and motives selected as described in chapter three, but the charts displayed below only include those that contributed more than the average amount to the construction of the dimensions on the chart. For each practice or motive included in the figures below there are two points, one indicating presence of the characteristic, the other indicating non-presence (prefixed 'not.'). I also included a range of social categories as supplemental variables, which appear on the maps but do not contribute to defining their dimensions. These are highlighted with a different colour; some are linked by a line connecting ordinal variables in rank order.

Five MCA plots are displayed below. To aid interpretation and clarity I have included more than one version of each plot, with just a small number of supplemental social categories to be included on each. I have only included social categories that appear to have some relationship to the dimensions displayed. Clouds of individuals can be found in appendix B.

## MCA plots: Key to variable names and descriptions

Variable name	Description
[Lo/Hi].Spend	Spent <£100 (Lo) / >£1,000 (Hi) on running in last year
[Low/Med/Hi]Freq	Ave. runs per week: 0-2 (Low); 3-4 (Med); 5+ (Hi)
Appear	Strong motivation to improve appearances
Books	Regularly read running books
Charity	Strong motivation to raise money for charity
Coachee	Regularly receiving coaching
Community	Strong motivation to be part of running community
DietWeight	Regularly diet to manage weight
Escape	Strong motivation to escape worries
Experience	Strong motivation to have great experiences
Explore	Strong motivation to explore the outdoors
Fell	Fell-race in last year
Fit	Strong motivation to get or stay fit
Goals	Strong motivation to set and achieve goals
GPS	Regularly use GPS device
HM	Half-marathon in last year
Jogger	Not raced in last year
Leader	Regularly a club or event leader
Medal	Regularly won medals
OCR	Obstacle course race in last year
Outdoors	Strong motivation to spend time outdoors



Parkrun	ParkRun in last year
Psych	Strong motivation to improve/maintain psychological wellbeing
Race	Strong motivation to do well in races
RepClub	Regularly represent club
Social	Strong motivation to socialise with runners
Socialise	Regularly socialise with runners
Sprinter	Track sprint race in last year
Think	Strong motivation to have time to think
Time	Strong motivation to achieve fast times
Treadmill	Regularly use a treadmill
Ultra	Ultra-marathon in last year
Volunteer	Regularly volunteer at running events/clubs
w.Club	Always runs with club/team
Weight	Strong motivation to lose/maintain weight
Youth	Strong motivation to look or feel young

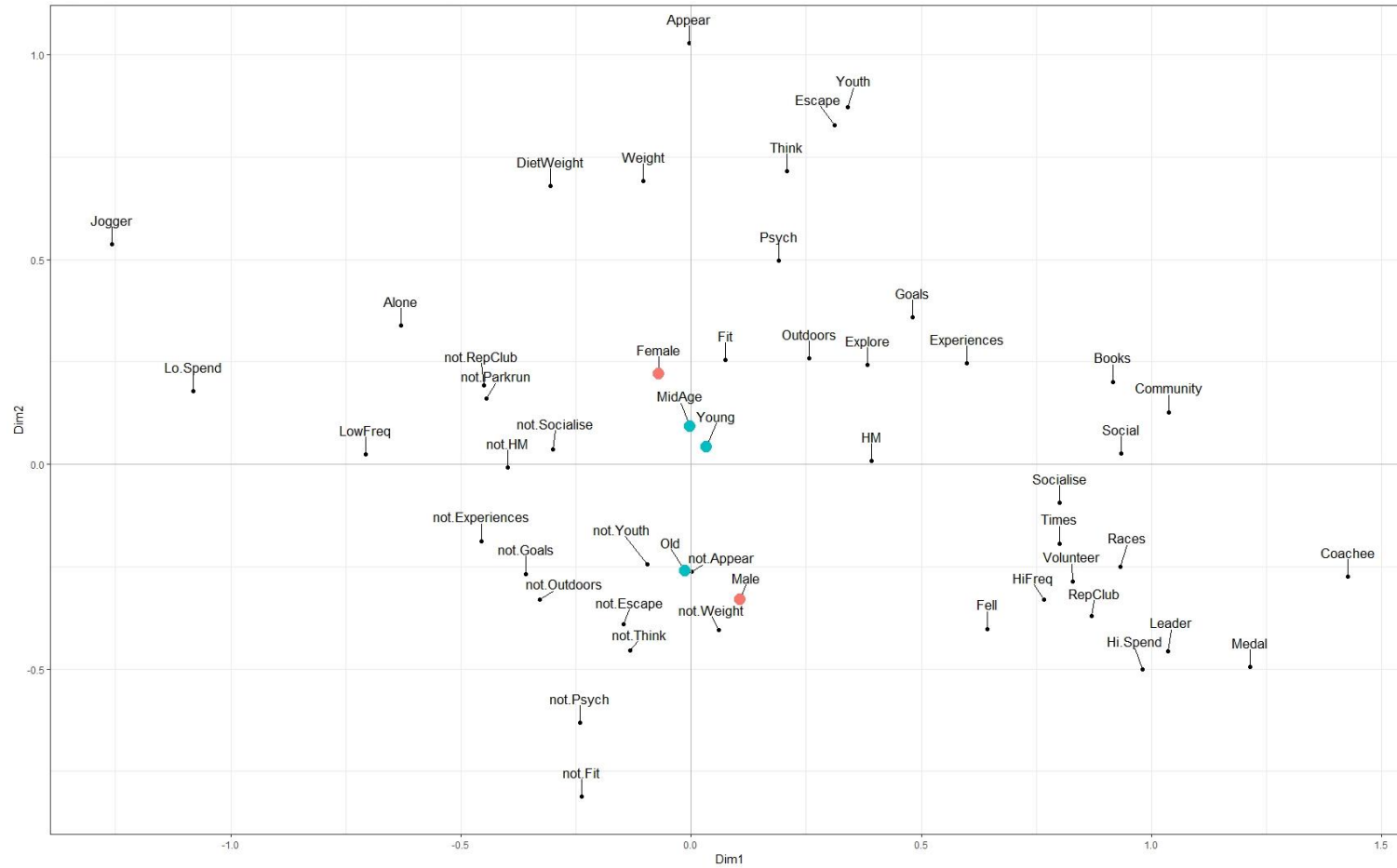


Figure 5: MCA plot showing dimensions 1 and 2.

Supplemental categories: Gender (red) and age (blue). Young: Under 30; MidAge: 30-49 years; Old: 50+ years

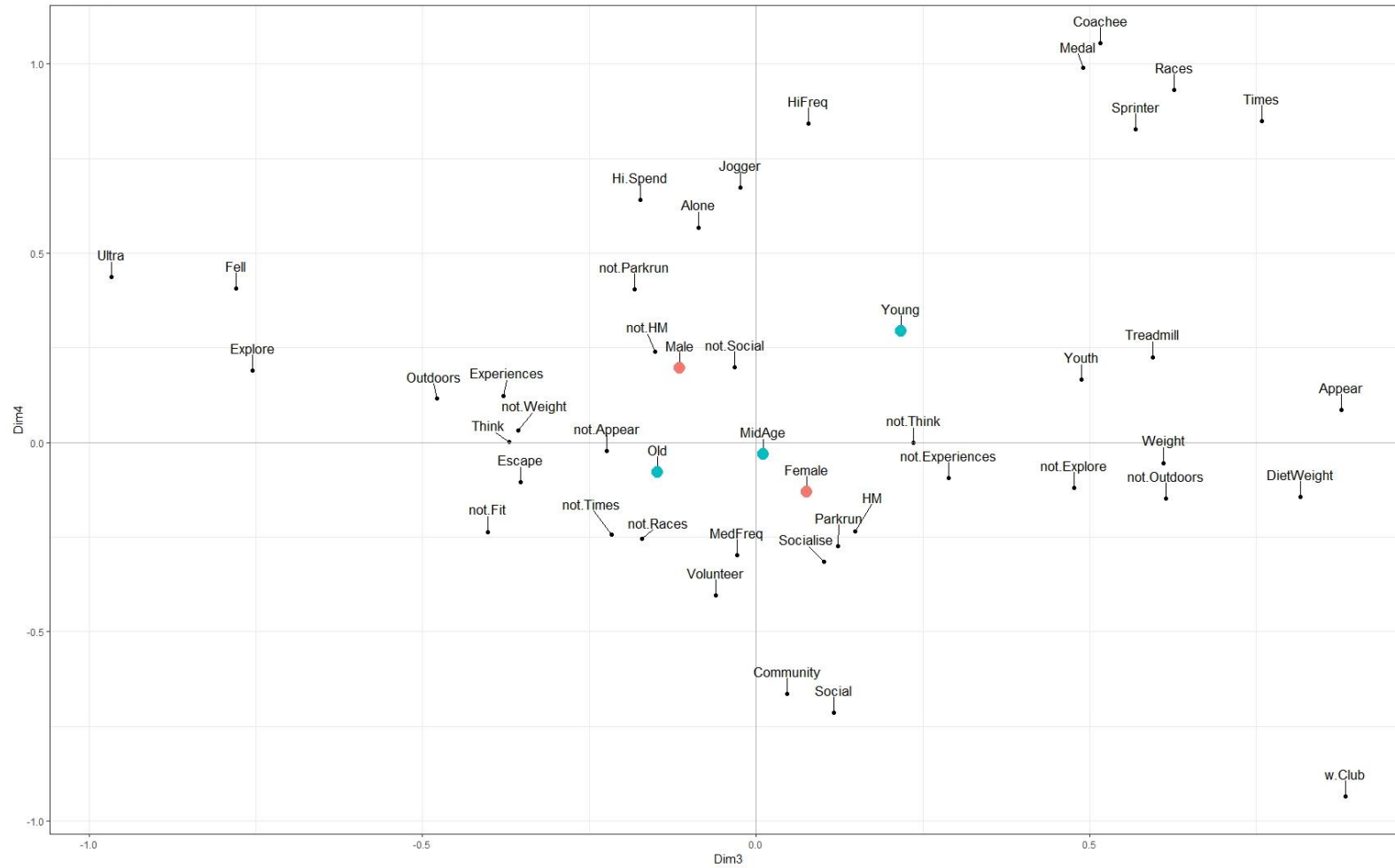


Figure 6: MCA plot showing dimensions 3 and 4.

Supplemental categories: Gender (red) and age (blue). Young: Under 30; MidAge: 30-49 years; Old: 50+ years

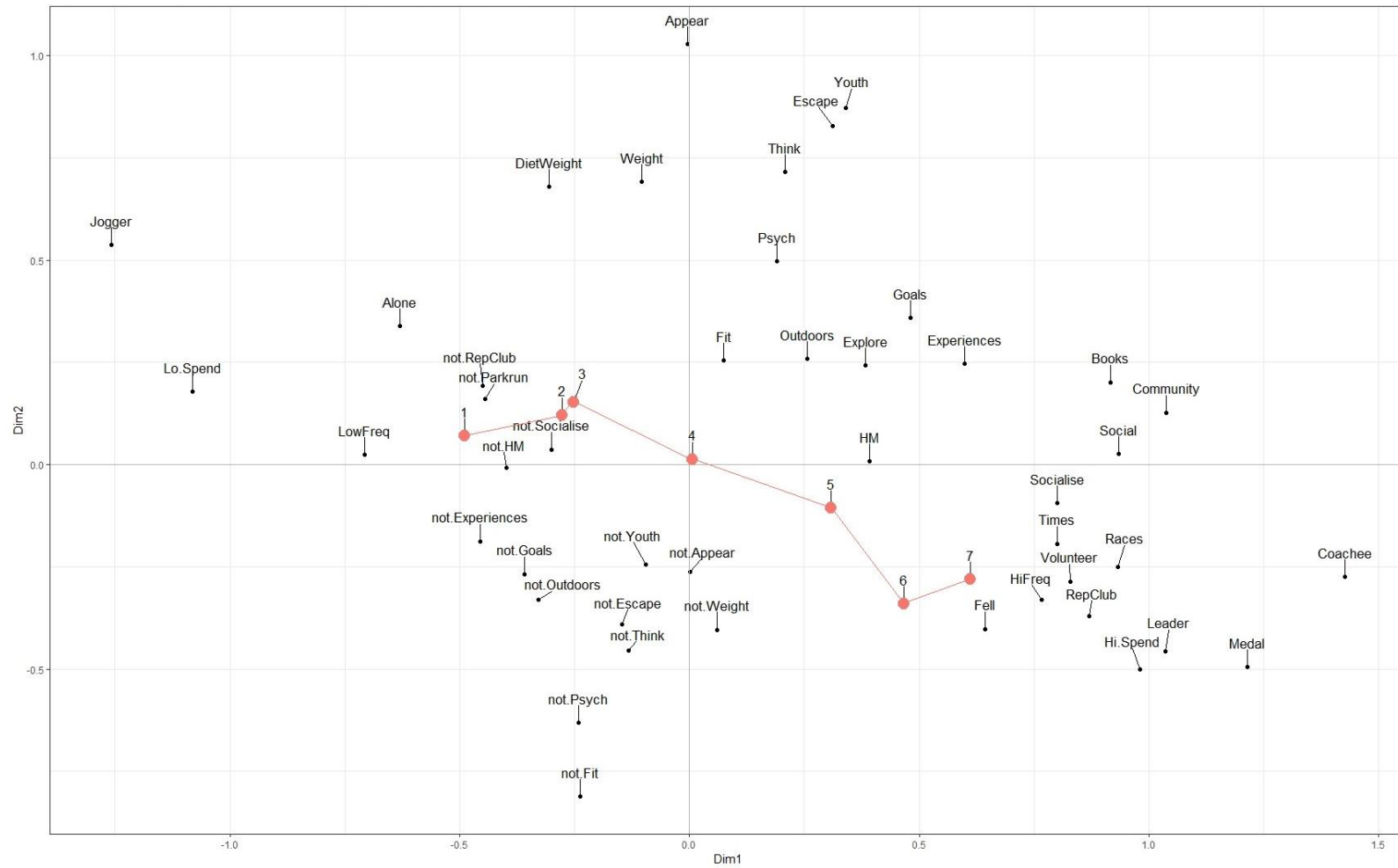


Figure 7: MCA plot showing dimensions 1 and 2.  
 Supplemental categories: Perceived talent score (red).

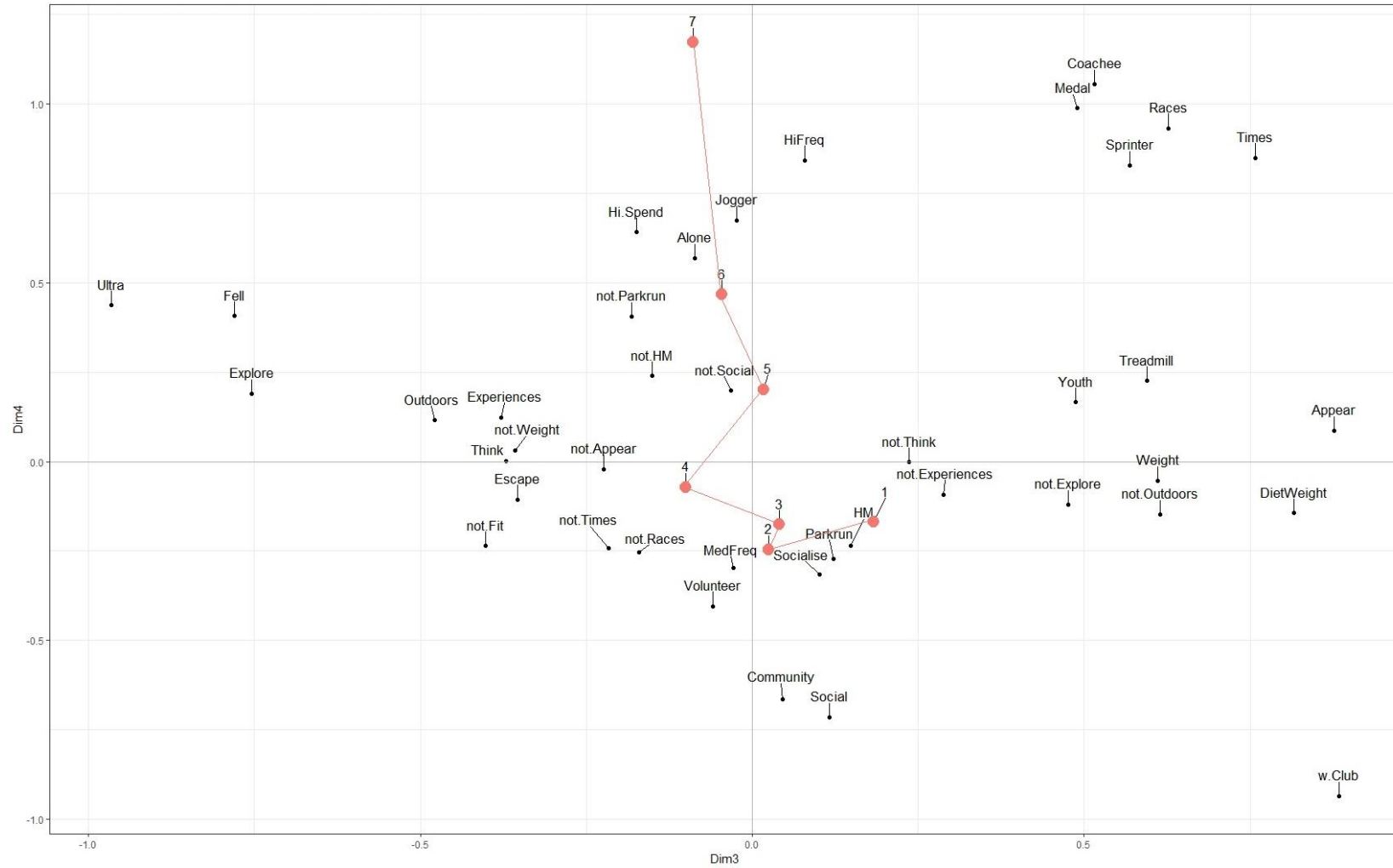


Figure 8: MCA plot showing dimensions 3 and 4.  
 Supplemental categories: Perceived talent score (red).

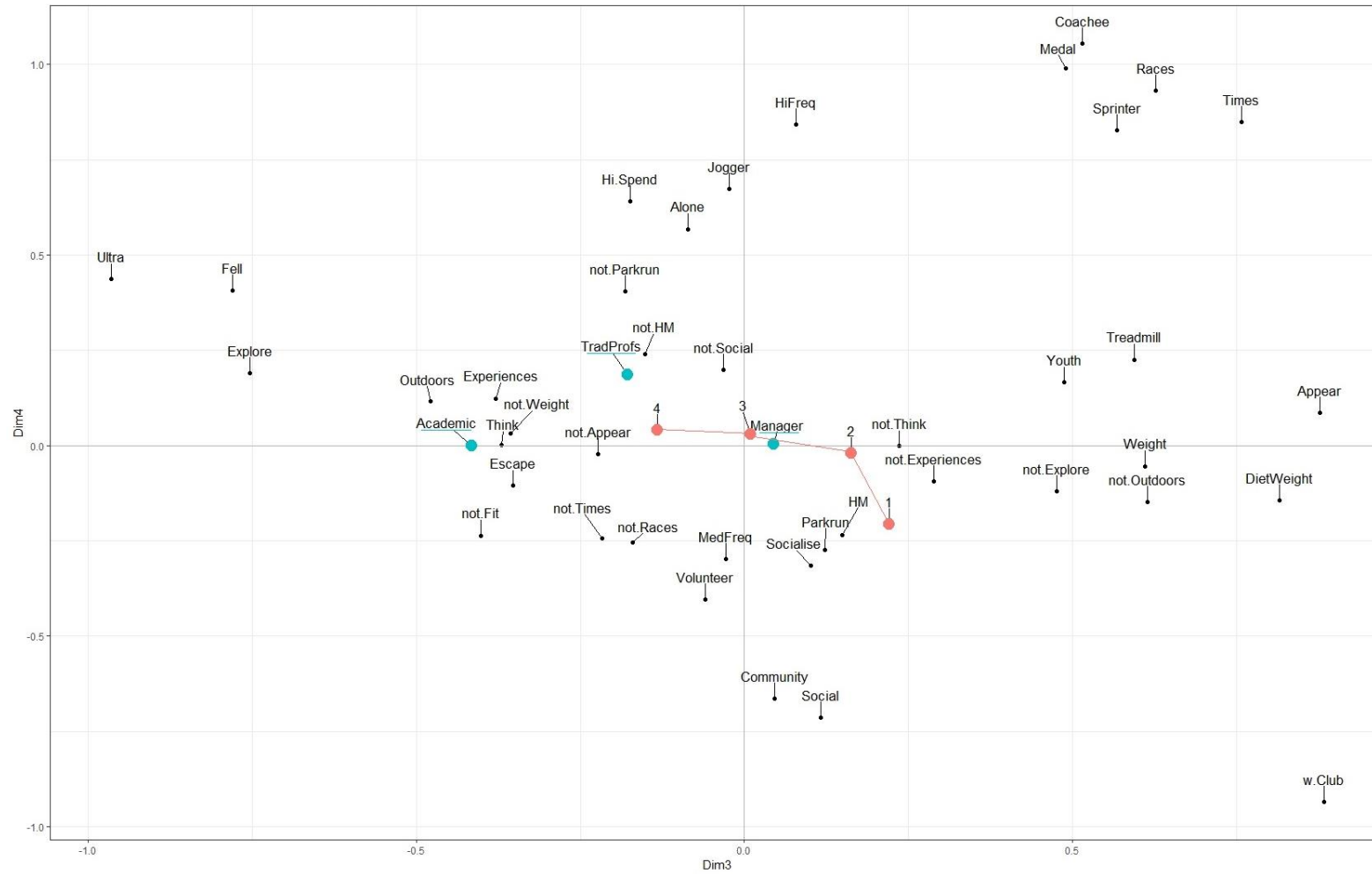


Figure 9: MCA plot showing dimensions 3 and 4.

Supplemental categories: Cultural capital rank (red) and subdivisions of NS-SEC 1 (blue).

Acad: Academic and research roles; TradProfs: Traditional professions; Manager: Senior managerial roles.

## 5.5 Interpreting the MCA plots

### 5.5.1 Dimension 1: Degree of engagement (10.2% of variance)

Perhaps the most striking thing about dimension 1 (the horizontal axis in figure 5) is the clustering of 'no' responses at the left side of the chart, along with a set of practices that suggest a lack of participation, such as low frequency of running and not taking part in running events (indicated by 'joggers'). People at this end of the dimension do not participate in many running practices, have few strong motivations and don't run very much. Conversely, those at the right end of dimension 1 show the highest levels of financial spend and running frequency and are engaged in lots of practices around running, particularly those relating to competing, socialising and organising. Overall, dimension 1 appears to be about engagement, distinguishing between casual and occasional (more often solitary) runners for whom running is not especially important, and those who are highly involved in the sport, more strongly motivated and often integrated into wider groups of runners. Those at the high end of this engagement dimension are often competitively or socially motivated, but all of the strong motivations included in the MCA appear somewhere at this end of the axis apart from losing weight. Figure 10 (page 163), which shows the positions of the main forms of running on the MCA plot, shows that participation in all the forms of running included in the MCA were associated with the high engagement end of the dimension, with track, fell and ultra-racing particularly high in this dimension.

We can see that gender and age are not important factors here. Education and income, as well as occupational category were also not related to the engagement dimension, and are not included on the plots. What was important though, was perceived talent (see figure 7). Runners who report having little talent occupy the low engagement end of the axis, and those who see themselves as talented occupy the highly engaged end. If we assume that perceptions of talent are closely linked to endowments of running specific physical capital this pattern makes perfect sense from a Bourdieusian perspective: Runners who have a greater embodied capacity to obtain symbolic rewards and social status within the field are more likely to commit significant

resources of time and energy to it; those who have little to gain prefer to expend their time and resources elsewhere.

### **5.5.2 Dimension 2: Self-care versus competition (6.4% of variance)**

The second dimension shown in figure 5 (the vertical axis) has at one extreme motivations around improving appearance, managing weight and looking or feeling young, as well as those focused on psychological well-being and escaping everyday worries. At the other end of the axis we find practices associated with competition such as winning medals, representing a club and being coached. The motives most strongly associated with this end of the axis are also competitive - doing well in races and running fast times. This dimension seems to differentiate between two key orientations to running: Competition and self-care. From figure 10 (page 163) we can see that the form most strongly associated with the competition end of the dimension is track sprinting; at the self-care end we are more likely to find treadmill users and (unsurprisingly) non-racers.

Gender is very important in structuring this dimension. Women are more strongly associated with the self-care end of the axis, and men tend towards the competitive end. The oldest runners appear somewhat more likely to have a competitive orientation (or are less likely to be oriented towards aspects of self-care) than the youngest. As one might expect, perceptions of talent are again important, with talented runners more likely to be competitive, but this is of less importance than gender. Income, education and occupation do not play important roles in this dimension.

### **5.5.3 Dimension 3: Goals versus experiences (5.7% of variance)**

Dimension 3 (horizontal axis in figure 6) was initially the most difficult to interpret. At one extreme (right) we find competitive motivations such as wanting to do well in races and running fast times, but there are also motivations around losing weight and looking good. In terms of practices, this end of the axis includes treadmill use and dieting to lose weight, but also track sprinting and receiving coaching. At the left end of the axis are located motivations around exploring, spending time outdoors and, to a lesser extent, having great experiences and escaping worries. Fell- and ultra-racing are the key forms of



running associated with this end of the dimension. What seems to be being distinguished between here are on the one hand, orientations to running that are focused on specific goals such as to lose weight or win races, and on the other, those oriented around the intrinsic enjoyment of running, particularly regarding contact with nature and the outdoor environment.

Age and gender both structure this dimension, with older and male runners in the sample more likely to be focused on intrinsic motivations, and younger and female runners more likely to be goal oriented. This may *in part* be a product of sample bias, which included a disproportionate number of fell-runners, who are predominantly older men and intrinsically oriented, but it also reflects the high level of goal orientation relating to weight and appearance amongst female runners (as per dimension 2). This is the only dimension in which perceived talent has negligible discriminatory power. Figure 9 shows that as education increases from GCSE equivalent (1) through A-level (2), degree (3) and postgraduate qualified (4) runners are more likely to be found at the intrinsic experience end of the dimension. In terms of occupational groups this effect is most striking amongst those in the highest status jobs (NS-SEC 1). Figure 9 shows the widely spaced locations of senior managers and business owners (Mans), traditional professionals (Profs) and academics/researchers (Acad) along dimension 3. The relative positions of these groups correspond with their mean education rank (3.2, 3.6, 3.9), and also with the inverse of their mean income rank (4.7, 3.9, 3.0). What this suggests is that dimension 3 differentiates not only across the sample according to education (or cultural capital) but also and especially between fractions of the dominant elements of the middle-class. To use Bourdieu's terminology, those with highest economic capital and (relatively) low cultural capital tend towards goal-oriented running; those with the highest cultural and lower economic capital are more likely to have a taste for the intrinsic, experiential pleasures of running.

#### **5.5.4 Dimension 4: Individual versus social orientation (4.3% of variance)**

At one extreme of the final dimension included in the MCA (vertical axis, figure 6) we can see a set of practices and motivations around engagement with other runners. Here socialising and community identification motivations are found

alongside volunteering at running events. Respondents located at this end of the axis also often socialise with other runners. At the other extreme we find competitive motivations, coaching, medal winning, running alone and high frequency runners. This dimension seems to reflect the contrast between runners with a social orientation to running who enjoy the fellowship of other runners, and those with an individualised, competitive approach focused on their own achievements. Figure 11 (page 164) shows that the types of running most associated with the social end of this dimension are obstacle course racing and Parkrun. At the individualised end we find both sprinting and jogging.

As shown by figure 6, male runners and the young are more strongly associated with individualised orientations. Women and older runners tend more towards the social end of the axis. As one might expect, high levels of perceived talent are strongly associated with individualised motives. However, neither income nor education play an important structuring role here.

#### **5.5.5 Summary of the maps of the field of running**

The fact that the four dimensions identified above account for only about 27% of the total variance in the model reminds us that running practices and motives are highly differentiated between individuals and that many other hidden factors play roles in shaping an individual's decisions around how they engage in the sport. However, we now have an overarching framework that captures the four most important structuring dimensions in running practices and motives. Using this framework, we can describe runners in terms of their position on four engagement axes: Degree of engagement; competitive/self-care orientation; goal/experience orientation; and individual/social focus. We have seen that this space is structured powerfully by perceived talent, which we might take as a proxy for physical capital. Gender plays a very important role in structuring the main motivational distinction between self-care and competitive running (dimension 2), as well as dimensions 3 and 4. Age too is significant in the latter pair of dimensions. In finding important roles for gender and age in structuring modes of cultural consumption, this research echoes that by Bennett et al. (2009) on wider cultural patterning. There was, however, less evidence of the influence of economic and cultural capital within running, with the notable

exception of education's important role in dimension 3. However, this is not to say that this represents the limit of these variables' relevance, for their effects may have been spread across numerous minor dimensions excluded from the MCA. This fact is particularly relevant to research question 2, which focuses on identifying the specific roles of key social variables in structuring involvement in running. It is thus necessary to complement the MCA with another form of analysis that enables the relationships between social variables and orientations to running to be more fully explored.

To this end, the next part of this chapter focuses on describing the statistical relationships between a range of key social characteristics and running practices and motives. For a large part of this analysis I will focus on engagement with institutional forms of running (types of race/event involvement). We can see from the MCA plots in figures 10 and 11 (pages 163 and 164) that engagement in different organised forms of running is highly important in structuring the field of running as a whole and in determining individual runners' positions within it, with the forms widely dispersed along all four dimensions. Indeed, it may be differences in the characteristics and participation profiles of these forms of running that provides much of the underlying structure of the MCA plots. Table 5 characterises each of the forms (plus non-racers and treadmill users) in terms of the dimensions of the MCA, and hence their distinctive meanings within the field.

Form	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4
Track sprinting	High engagement	Competitive	Goal focused	Individual orientation
Half marathon	Somewhat engaged	Not distinctive	Not distinctive	Not distinctive
Fell and Ultra	High engagement	Competitive	Experience focused	Individual orientation
Obstacle course	Not distinctive	Not distinctive	Not distinctive	Social orientation
Non-racing	Low engagement	Somewhat self-care	Not distinctive	Individual orientation
Treadmill	Not distinctive	Not distinctive	Goal focused	Individual orientation

*Table 5: Positions of forms in terms of meanings of the four dimensions of the field.*

As I explained earlier, I was not able to use the full range of forms in the MCA for technical reasons, but now we can bring this data into the analysis. By looking at bivariate relationships between all the forms and the social characteristics of those who participate in them, we can both be more precise about social differences between recognised ways of doing running and can explore the nuances of patterns that emerge across and between the forms. First, I will examine the role of age and gender in differentiating between forms of running, then I will move on to examine differences in terms of occupational class and finally economic and cultural capital.

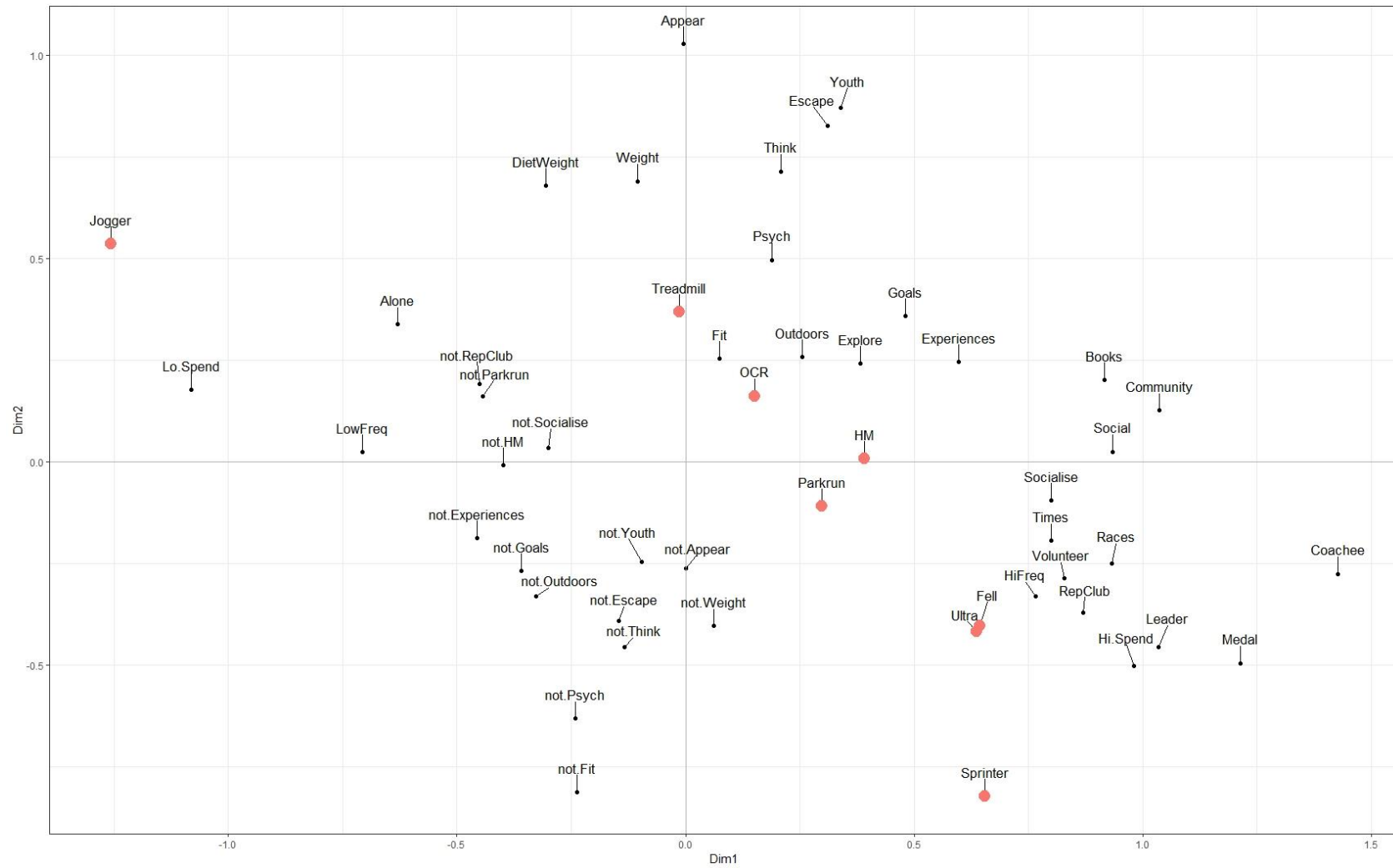


Figure 10: MCA plot showing locations of forms of running on dimensions 1 and 2.

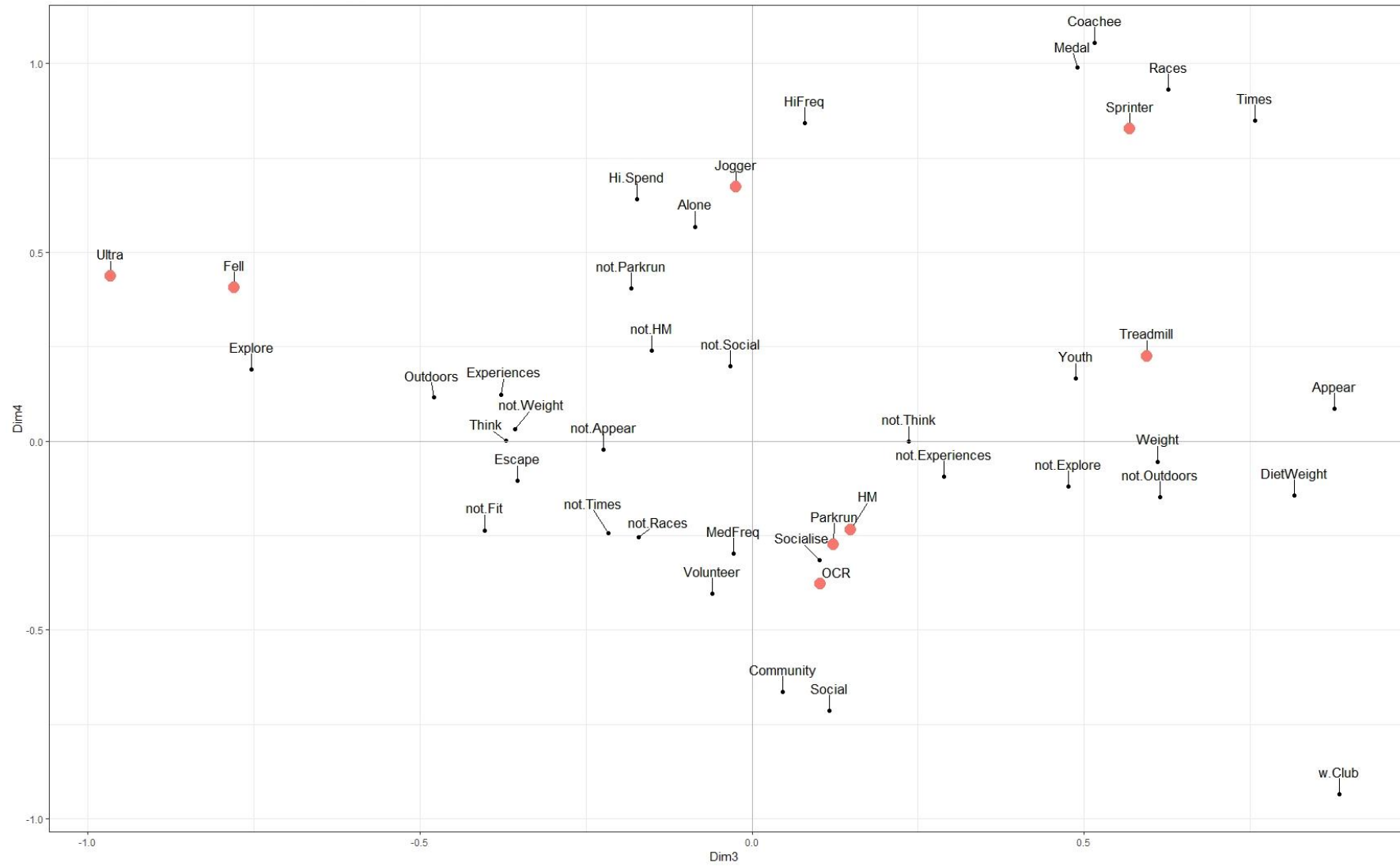


Figure 11: MCA plot showing locations of forms of running on dimensions 3 and 4.

## 5.6 Social variables in focus: Age and gender

From the MCA plots we have seen that gender and age play important roles structuring the second (self-care/competitive), third (goals/experience) and fourth (social/individual) dimensions of the field of running. Now then, I want to address the relationships between these variables and the established forms of running directly. Figure 12 shows the locations of the different forms in terms of the mean age and gender of participants, as mapped in Cartesian space. Gender is shown as the percentage of male runners reported for each form of running. The red lines indicate the sample means. Any form of running appearing to the left of the vertical line indicates a higher proportion of women participate than the average across the sample. Forms to the right of the line have a higher proportion of men than average. It should be borne in mind that more women responded to the BRS than men, hence 40% male being the average across the entire sample. Judging by the APS data for running as a whole (see figure 2), it is likely that in truth male runners are in a slight majority, but were less likely to complete the survey. This does not impact the validity of the chart below, provided readers are careful not to interpret the gender balances reported as reflecting those in the population under study. What is important is the *relative* positioning of the forms along the gender axis rather than their absolute gender balance scores.

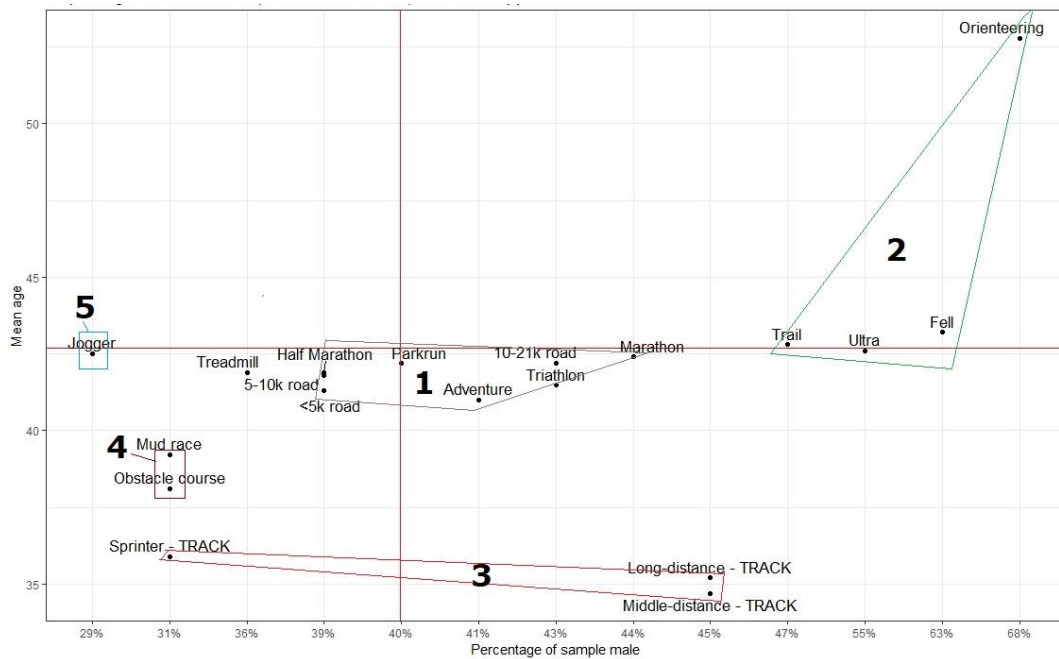


Figure 12: Mean age and gender ratio of participants in different forms of running. Red vertical and horizontal lines indicate sample means.

A key observation from figure 12 is that there is a noticeable clustering of form that take place in similar environments. This suggests differences in the appeal or accessibility of the forms may be significantly connected to where they take place. Four important environmental groupings (numbered and bounded by the coloured shapes) can be discerned:

1. (Grey shape) road races
2. (Green shape) races normally taking place in rural settings
3. (Red shape) athletics track races
4. (Brown shape) races taking place over purpose-built obstacle courses

Joggers, the fifth numbered group, though not necessarily connected to a particular environment, are highlighted too because of their distinctive position in the chart and how this might relate to the fact that this group is the only one not to participate in any kind of competition. Treadmill use also sits outside this typology and in a distinctive part of the gender-age space.

From this map we can see that the red 'track' cluster is markedly youthful in its participation base, but taking the cluster as a whole, which includes male (middle- and long-distance) and female (sprint distance) dominated forms



(perhaps due to relatively small sample sizes) the gender balance appears relatively typical within running. The mean age of around 35 years is likely to be a significant over-estimate because of sample bias - the random sampled APS data suggests a mean figure of 20 years. Low BRS survey response rates from very young adults appears to have been an issue here. Both the APS and BRS samples for track runners are small (see table 4) so caution needs to be exercised, however, a much lower average age compared with other forms reflects my personal experiences in the field.

Components of the 'rural' cluster (fell, ultra, trail and orienteering) are marked by a heavy leaning towards male participants. This is especially true of orienteering, which also stands out from the rest in terms of age, with a mean of over 50 years. This cluster is characterised by often taking place in 'wild', rural and remote environments, long event durations and the requirement for navigational skills and outdoor competence. Judging by the proximity of fell-running and ultra-running on the MCA, these forms may share many motivational and practical characteristics. The older age of orienteers could be related to the fact that orienteering relies on good navigational skills (cultural capital) as well as simple fitness (physical capital), enabling older runners who have experienced a loss of physical capital but have spent more time within the orienteering field building up skills and knowledge to continue participating longer than they would be able to in more physically focused forms of running.

Mud and OCR races, making up the 'obstacle' cluster, are located close to one another on both the age and gender axes, where they indicate a relatively youthful group with a moderate leaning towards female participants compared to the overall running population. The validity of this gender balance is questionable. Calculating the percentage of female finishers in published results from ten recent OCR and mud races I found 31-41% female participation, compared to around 45% for a comparable sample of half marathons (which are situated closer to the sample mean in the BRS data). This may be explained by sample distortion introduced through the ways in which the survey was passed between running groups on social media. A similar analysis of previous published race results but focusing on age shows that of the half marathons surveyed

around 50% of runners were over 40 years of age, whereas for OCRs and mud races only around 20% were of this age, with most participants in their 30s. This is broadly consistent with the BRS data and lends weight to the characterisation of OCR and mud races as relatively youthful forms of the sport.

The centre of the chart is dominated by elements of the 'road running' cluster, indicating both road running's position as relatively open to both genders and all ages, and the large sample size for this group, which naturally drags the means towards it. The size and position of this group, reflecting the broad popularity and ease of access of road running, establishes this cluster as a kind of baseline, relatively 'undistinctive' form of running, against which other forms' meanings and barriers can be understood.

Non-racing runners, the 'joggers' cluster, are set apart from the other forms to the feminised end of the horizontal axis, suggesting joggers are more likely to be women than any of the types of competitive runner. This would make sense given the BRS data's evidence for lower mean competitive motivation for female runners, explored in detail in detail in chapter seven. Treadmill use also tends towards a higher proportion of female runners. The MCAs suggest that this might be connected to women's higher levels of goal (dimension 3) and self-care (dimension 2) orientations, which are also related to treadmill use.

Adventure racing has also been excluded from the categories above. This is because there appears to be a lack of a common definition of what an adventure race is amongst the BRS respondents. Some may have interpreted this to mean multi-day races across remote and rugged terrain; others appear to have interpreted it as synonymous with obstacle course racing. This appears to be reflected in its position somewhere between the 'obstacle' and 'rural' clusters. Triathlon is not categorised because as multi-event sport, it does not fit clearly into any one category. Parkrun is the final form that appears on the chart, but is not referred to above. As the name suggests, these races take place in parks, so can have both urban and rural aspects. They are very popular events, attracting a wide variety of runners, reflected in their position close to the sample mean for both gender and age.

To aid interpretation of the simple mean ages given above, figure 13 unpacks this variable for a selection of forms, showing the proportion of runners engaged at every age from 18 to 70. The grey line indicates the overall trend. Here we can see that obstacle course racing, and especially middle distance (track) racing are associated with younger runners. The middle-distance distribution is particularly striking in the abrupt drop off in participation rates for runners over about 25. Marathon is most popular in the middle of the age spectrum, with lower rates amongst both young and old runners. Non-competitive jogging has a relatively flat distribution across age groups. Fell-running (along with ultra-racing and orienteering) becomes slightly more prevalent in the sample as age increases, with the highest rates somewhere around the mid-50s.

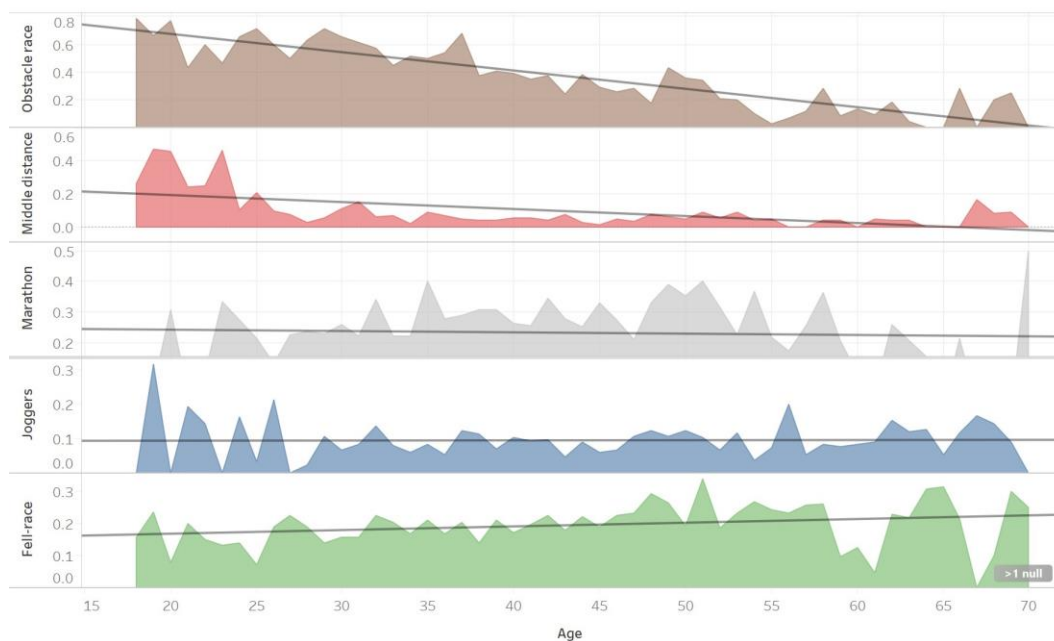
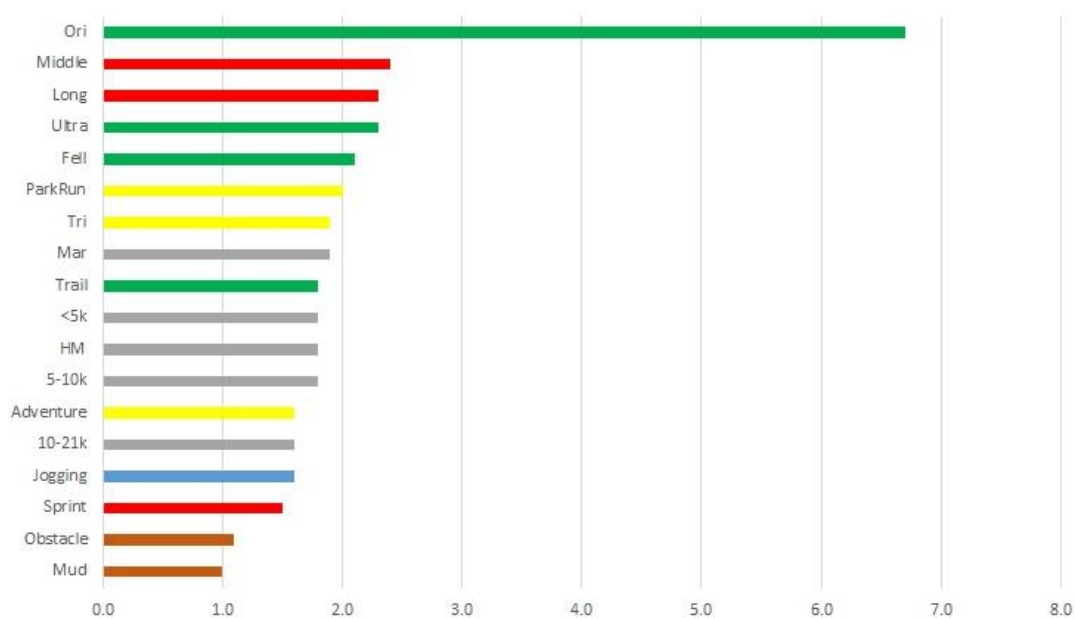


Figure 13: Proportion of respondents reporting participation in selected forms by age.

### 5.7 Social variables in focus: Occupational class

Figure 9 (page 156) showed that dimension 3 (goal/experience orientation) of the MCA appeared to have some relationship to occupation, although in that plot I focused only on subdivisions of NS-SEC 1. Next, I want to explore the relationship between occupation and running practice in more depth. Figure 14 shows the ratio of participants in each form of running who reported holding jobs in NS-SEC 1 (senior managers, professionals and large employers) to those

indicating NS-SEC 5-8 (technical, semi-routine and routine occupations and long-term unemployed). Note that this is not directly comparable to figure 4, which used NS-SEC 1 and 2 for the higher status element. I chose to use the narrower banding here because there proved to be very little variation in participation rates for NS-SEC 2, with the exception of joggers, who are relatively over-represented amongst this occupational group. Excluding this occupational category helps to highlight the distinctions between the forms. The data was filtered to exclude children (those under the age of 18). Bars are coloured to reflect the environmental cluster of the form they represent.



*Figure 14: Ratio of NS-SEC classes 1 to 5-8 in various forms of running.*

The data presented in figure 14 shows the wide range in occupational profiles across different forms of running. These range from mud and obstacle races, which attract similar numbers of participants from manual/routine occupations as they do from professionals/senior managerial backgrounds, through to orienteering, where there are almost seven times as many higher occupational category participants than lower category members. In fact, only 6% of orienteers fell into NS-SEC 5-8, half the figure for the next lowest ranked form. Fell-running also attracts a large number of NS-SEC 1 participants, (30% compared to 39% for orienteering) but presents a much less extreme ratio because it also attracts a relatively large number of NS-SEC 5-8 runners (15%). In this, fell-running is unusual: Compared to other forms it attracts high proportions

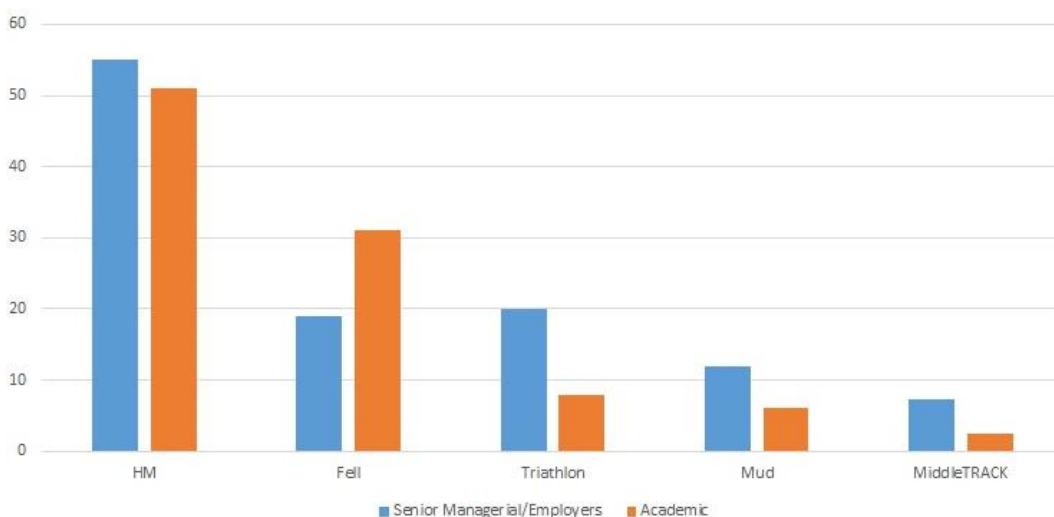
of runners at either end of the occupational class spectrum, but relatively few from the middle. Jogging's low ratio is a result, primarily, of low NS-SEC 1 participation rather than high levels of involvement from NS-SEC 5-8. As mentioned above, jogging attracts a significantly larger mid-range following than any of the competitive forms.

The clusters identified for gender and age in figure 12 (page 166) appear to remain reasonably coherent in figure 14: Green 'rural' forms are close together, showing the highest number of NS-SEC 1 occupations relative to NS-SEC 5-8; conversely, brown 'obstacle' forms show the lowest ratio, split only by 'jogging'. Grey 'road' forms are clustered close to the middle of the range along with adventure racing and parkrun. The red (track) cluster is split here, as it was in figure 12, with sprinting attracting significantly more NS-SEC 5-8 participants than middle- and long-distance forms of track racing.

Looking at the spread of forms in figures 12 and 14 it is notable that gender and occupational class appear to structure choice of running form in a similar way. The sequence of forms (and clusters) from most feminised to most masculinised is roughly the same as the sequence running from low to high occupational category ratio. This suggests that at least part of the patterns in figure 14 reflect gender differences in occupational category. In the BRS data men are more likely to hold NS-SEC 1 jobs than women. Perhaps the high proportion of men in orienteering, ultra and fell-running explains the higher proportion of NS-SEC 1 participants in these sports. This might also explain the lower ratio for jogging, OCR and mud races, all of which have relatively high proportions of female runners in the sample. We will investigate this by looking at whether these effects persist within genders below. First though, following up on the insights about differences between occupational sub-divisions within the top occupational group suggested in MCA dimension 3 (goal/experience orientation), I will deconstruct the headline findings from figure 14 in another way.

NS-SEC 1 is the occupational category with the highest overall holdings of capital, but as I touched on earlier, the MCA plots suggest that using this as a single analytical category obscures important internal differences in terms of tastes within running. By dividing the group into three based on their job type we can

distinguish between those Bourdieu (2010) refers to as coming from the ‘dominant fraction of the dominant class’, meaning those with a preponderance of economic capital, and those from the ‘dominated fraction of the dominant class’, meaning those especially rich in cultural capital. Some members of NS-SEC 1, academics for example, are particularly rich in cultural capital compared to other members of the category - senior business managers, for example - but the latter tend to hold significantly higher levels of economic capital (see Bourdieu, 2010). By breaking NS-SEC 1 down into sub-categories reflecting occupations with different typical ratios of economic and cultural capital, we can address the question of what role each form of capital plays in structuring participation across the forms. Figure 15 depicts the percentage of senior manager/employers who take part in five selected forms (in blue) alongside the corresponding percentage of academic occupations (in orange). These groups represent the fractions of NS-SEC 1 in the BRS with the highest volumes of economic and cultural capital respectively.



*Figure 15: Percentage of academics and senior managers/employers participating in selected forms of running.*

In figure 15, half marathon (HM), a popular, mainstream and therefore relatively undistinctive form of running, appears roughly equally attractive to members of the senior manager and academic groups. In the forms that are more distinctive, this balance changes. Fell-running appears significantly more appealing to

academics (with high cultural capital) than senior managers<sup>28</sup>. Triathlon, mud races and middle-distance track races appeal more to senior managers (with high economic capital). The strong bias towards senior managers for triathlon could be explained by the relatively high cost of this form. Although it is unlikely many of those holding academic jobs would be priced out of the market for a bicycle, it is possible that the higher cost of equipment and race fees might put off some academics – especially early in their careers when their salaries would be much less than those of senior managers. But aside from such practical factors, differences in habitus and, specifically, taste, may be playing an important role here too. Before making any assertions in this direction we need to pile up more evidence of the independent roles of different social characteristics in structuring the space of running. We can achieve this by looking at the opposition between economic and cultural capital more directly, through the proxies of personal income and level of education variables, and by exploring this within each gender.

### **5.8 Social variables in focus: Economic and cultural capital**

We saw in figure 9 (page 156) that cultural capital was related to preferences around running orientation, but no relationship to economic capital could be discerned across the four dimensions analysed. For Bourdieu, however, cultural *and* economic capital were key structuring variables of social space, both through their role in shaping taste and their utility in overcoming barriers to taking up certain positions within fields (see Hardy, 2012). The lack of evidence in the MCA of a role for economic capital seems surprising given the differences in the occupational, gender and age profiles across the forms described above, so next I want to explore economic and cultural capital more directly to see if patterns can be discerned that were not revealed in the four dimensions of the MCA.

Using ‘personal income’ as an indicator of economic capital and ‘highest level of education achieved’ as a proxy for cultural capital we can map out the different forms of running in a space organised according to four hierarchized poles

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<sup>28</sup> Orienteering is not included in the chart because it was collected as a booster sample, so calculating participation rates across the full dataset is not possible.

corresponding to high and low volumes of each form of capital. Bourdieu's focus on the role of capital holdings in structuring taste has been criticised for its neglect of gender (see Laberge, 1995; Thorpe, 2009), but by plotting male and female participation separately within the same map we can sidestep this problem and, importantly in this highly gendered space (see figure 12), separate gender effects from those of economic or cultural capital *per se*.

The resulting map in figure 16 shows mean income (vertical axis) and education (horizontal axis) ranks plotted for male participants in red and female in green. The coloured shapes enclosing areas of the chart give an idea of the amount of variance within and between genders. Only adult participants (18 years and older) were included. The map reflects the degree to which running conforms to a wider social logic – how socially powerful variables that are ostensibly irrelevant to running reach into the sport, shaping practice and creating new markers of social difference and distinction.

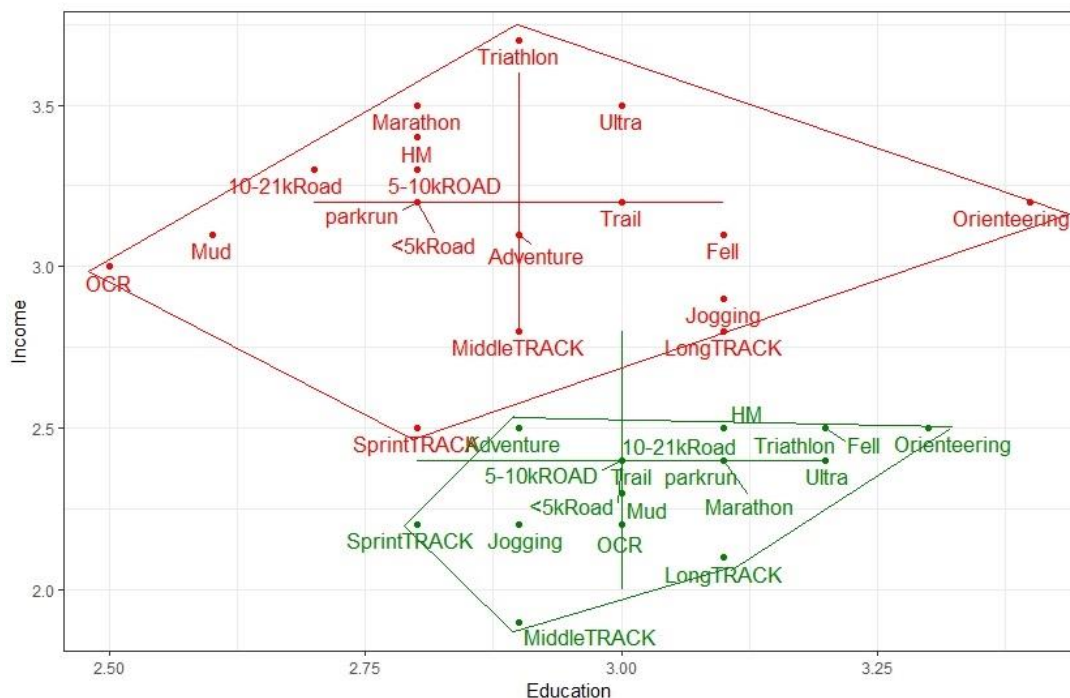


Figure 16: Forms displayed by mean education rank (x-axis) and personal income rank (y-axis). Male participants in red, female in green. Means for each gender shown by horizontal and vertical lines of corresponding colour.

Figure 16 vividly demonstrates the value of considering bivariate relationships between social characteristics and forms of running to complement the analysis



provided by the MCA. The MCA plots showed no significant role for income in structuring practice in any of the 4 dimensions considered, yet here we can see considerable differences between forms for both men's and women's mean income rank. What this suggests is that whilst income (or economic capital) may not be a primary factor structuring the field of running, it may still play a significant role that needs to be considered.

The lack of overlap between the two areas enclosed around the gendered forms and the locations of the markers of the gender means clearly demonstrate the strong relationship between gender and income in the sample, as well as the less pronounced but also significant link between gender and education. It reminds us that imbalances in participation rates between genders could be behind many of the relationships between forms and capital if we fail to disentangle male and female data. The size of the enclosed areas approximating the area of the plots occupied by male and female forms highlights another important and gendered distinction, namely that there is a much higher degree of social variance in male participation than there is in female. This is a surprising finding, and might suggest that distinctive forms of running may be particularly associated with particular types of masculine identity that are in turn associated with different social positions defined by capital ratio and volume. We will explore this further later.

Comparing the structuring of participation within the genders we can see some striking similarities, suggesting that even though the correlations between capital forms and participation are weaker (often statistically insignificant) for women, they may well reflect real – though subtle - relationships. Once again, the clusters identified in figures 12 (page 166) and 14 (page 170) remain fairly coherent, and in ways that persist across gender lines: The 'rural' forms are associated with high cultural capital; 'road' forms cluster close to the means; 'track' forms are associated with low economic capital; 'obstacle' forms are connected to low cultural and economic capital. 'Jogging' bucks the trend slightly, appearing in the lower economic capital portion of both male and female forms, but being associated with high cultural capital amongst men, and low amongst women.

## 5.9 Summary of key findings and next steps

The analysis above allows us to make some important claims about the field of running, aspects of which will be explored over the coming chapters. First, we have seen that running has a relatively balanced gender split compared to other sports and that it attracts people of a wide range of ages. However, it is quite distinctive in terms of class, attracting a participation base that includes a much greater proportion of professional and managerial occupations than most other sports. We also saw that running is disproportionately 'white' and able-bodied in its social makeup. Next, we saw that running participation can be understood in terms of four key dimensions relating to level of engagement, self-care/competitive goals, experience/goal motivation and social/individual orientation. The MCA plots showed that perceived talent, gender, age and education were related to people's positions on these dimensions in important ways. Digging deeper into the roles of social variables, we learnt that gender, age, occupation, education and income (the latter two used as markers of cultural and economic capital) were all related to the institutional forms of running people engaged in. The wide spacing of these forms in the field depicted in the MCA plots, along with striking differences in terms of the social variables associated with them, suggest that they represent quite distinctive cultural practices appealing to significantly different social groups. This appears to support the idea of running as a constellation of practices rather than a single socially and culturally homogenous pastime. An important factor in generating these distinctions appears to have been the environments associated with different forms, with those sharing the same places and spaces appealing to similar social groups.

Over the next three chapters I will explore these findings in more detail, drawing on further evidence from the BRS along with qualitative data from my interviews to help make sense of how and why some of these patterns might be understood. In the interests of providing a detailed treatment of the subject matter I have had to be selective in terms of the topics I have chosen to concentrate on. Each of the next two chapters focuses on one pole of the key distinction in motivational orientation revealed by the data – that between self-

care and competition<sup>29</sup>. This distinction was depicted in dimension 2 of the MCA, which also highlighted the strong relationship between gender and these orientations. These chapters also explore how running's relationship to both self-care and competition can help shed light on the sport's overall appeal to high status groups. In the final findings chapter, I turn to the important role of environments in shaping the meaning and appeal of different ways of doing running, which, as we shall see, has relevance to issues of gender, age and class.

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<sup>29</sup> Dimension 1 of the MCA, 'engagement', has more explanatory power, but is largely based around the *amount* of involvement in the sport rather than qualitative differences in motivation or meaning.

## Chapter 6: Findings II

# Running and the disciplined self

### 6.1 Meanings of health and fitness

Talk and thinking around 'health', 'fitness' and to an extent 'slimness' can be difficult to untangle. Many runners I spoke to appeared to use these and similar words almost interchangeably when talking about their motivations for running. To complicate things further, a word like 'fitness' can mean substantially different things to different people; some runners see their fitness in terms of sporting performance, others use it to refer to something closely related to health or well-being (see Wright, O'Flynn, and MacDonald, 2006). Indeed, being 'fit' can also mean uninjured, and colloquially, physically attractive. Perhaps this ambiguity helps make sense of the BRS finding that the goal of becoming or keeping fit was the most widespread motivation for running. 99% of respondents rated it as at least quite important to them, and 75% rated it as very important. These figures point both to the importance of being fit to runners and the close relationship between the practice of running and the attainment of fitness. However, we need to turn to the interview data to explore exactly what fitness means to those involved.

Whilst there is little variation to explain in the BRS statistics around fitness orientation the same is not true when we turn to motivations around the management of body weight and shape through running. As we saw in the MCA in figures 5 and 6 (pages 152 and 153), a distinctive motivational cluster can be detected in the BRS data centring on what we might describe as body management. This cluster, which stands out in both axis 2 (competitive/self-care) and 3 (goal/experience orientation), includes motivations around losing or maintaining weight and improving personal appearance. Its distance from competitive motivations in axis 2 suggests that body management can be understood as one side of a coin that has competitive motivations (which are discussed in the next chapter) as its obverse. Both body management and

competitive orientations are goal driven (hence their proximity in axis 3 which distinguishes goal from experience focused runners), but they target quite different goals.

The locations of the gender categories in figures 5 and 6 show that gender plays an important role in structuring body management orientation, with women more likely to express these goals than men. Indeed, according to the BRS data, 74% of women cited the desire to improve their appearance as a motivation for running compared to 49% of men, with 27% of women describing this as a 'very important' factor compared to only 11% of men. In terms of weight management there was less difference, with 85% of women considering this a motivation compared to 70% of men. Age is also related to runners' motivation to improve their appearances. Older runners are significantly less motivated by this than their younger counterparts. In terms of socioeconomic status, after accounting for gender there is a significant relationship between higher levels of education and lower concern with both weight management (Spearman's rank correlation test,  $p < 0.008$ ) and appearance ( $p < 0.036$ ) motivations. This appears to be associated with axis 3 of the MCA in figure 9 (page 156), which shows lower expressions of goal orientation amongst more educated groups.

Taken in the round, the BRS data suggests that some form of fitness motivation is near ubiquitous amongst runners. Over the chapter that follows I will describe the different meanings the runners I interviewed attached to fitness and its related concepts, and how these both played into their understandings of the sport's role in their lives, and connected to a wider network of ideas around health, fitness and the body. I will also explore the idea hinted at above, that a specific focus on managing the body's appearance could be construed as a feminised orientation to running, in contrast with the masculine competitive orientation discussed in the next chapter. I will also explore the roles of class and age in shaping the body management priorities of different groups.

## **6.2 Running and the 'healthy lifestyle'**

Despite the ambiguity around understandings of fitness, one universal theme did emerge during the interviews. Across all of my interviewees, encompassing a

wide range of runners with a variety of other motivations, fitness understood as something akin to 'healthiness' was universally valued. This importance placed on physical health and vitality is in line with what we might expect given the pervasive network of technologies and expertise focused around healthism in modern society discussed in chapter 2 (see Mayes, 2016; Rose, 2012). Colin's and Clara's words illustrate how healthy living was viewed by many of the respondents as an essential element of a fulfilled, successful life – a life to be proud of:

I take pride in the fact that I'm healthy, you know, and that I do healthy things and I lead an active and healthy life.

*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

You know what, this is life, you need to stay fit you, need to stay healthy.

*(Clara, 40 year old female police officer)*

Another interviewee, Jacqui, described similar attitudes, linking her healthiness to a sense of being a 'better' version of herself, but she also equated health with normality. For Jacqui, healthiness seems to be seen as a desirable norm, or perhaps a kind of hygiene factor necessary for an unproblematic existence:

Even if I wasn't striving towards [a race]... doing 10k a day I'd definitely feel like a much better person, you know just generally healthy, active... just feeling much more sort of normal almost.

*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

Jacqui and Colin's comments in particular highlight the satisfaction and pleasure self-discipline around an ethic of healthy living can produce in a society that promotes this kind of lifestyle as an ideal. But for those who have internalised this model of the 'good life' but fail to live up to its ideals there can, of course, be negative emotional consequences too. Here, the uncomfortable dissonance between internalised norms around health and perceptions of the self can sometimes act as a spur to action. The following excerpts from Gwen's interview for instance, describe how an awareness of how unhealthy and inactive her habits had become since leaving university – and how they were making her feel like 'a different person' - spurred her to transform her lifestyle:

During my 20s I was mainly focused on working and basically I put on about 6 stone and did almost no exercise and drank loads and worked horrendous hours... I didn't feel like I was me in those years. I felt like I was being a different person, because I was. I was just - all I did was work, drive home, do some studying, eat whatever presented itself to me. And you know how it is, when you're absolutely shattered you just don't really care what you eat, it's just any old rubbish, and obviously drinking as well... I was with some friends... and we said... we should really make an effort and do something different this year, we do the same stuff year in year out... [So] we all joined a gym and we all lost lots of weight... I started running again just to keep fit and lose weight. And from then on I didn't stop... so that's been it ever since. That's been our lifestyle.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, retired actuary)*

Similarly, Jennifer, a teacher, took up running in her 20s to balance out what she perceived as an unhealthy, hedonistic lifestyle:

I just got hooked very quickly. I lost a lot of weight, mainly through running, and I just loved it... in that time of our life there was a lot of socialising, a lot of going out, a lot of late nights, a lot of drinking, and it was, I think it was my one healthy thing.

*(Jennifer, 37 year old female part-time private school teacher)*

Whilst maintaining a healthy lifestyle was usually described as a goal in itself, some respondents also identified particular ways in which healthiness enabled them to fulfil specific social roles more successfully or responsibly. Two of the women (though none of the men) interviewed framed their engagement in running as facilitating their ability to be a good parent:

As a mum, I think it's even more important to stay fit and healthy, for my son to be able to go and do fun things with him... I wanna be around as long as I can for [her son], so I want to stay fit and I want to stay healthy.

*(Katie, 35 year old female marketing manager)*

I think it's really important for the kids. I want them to see my going out on a Sunday morning in the rain, in the cold [to do sport]... I've found,

when I was say 12 months, 18 months ago [before she started running], when your child runs at you to jump and you flinch and you go oh my god, because my back used to hurt so much or I was in so much pain, but now I feel yeah, I can play football, I can run around, I can climb trees, I can do whatever else everyone else does.

*(Clara, 40 year old female police detective)*

Again, healthiness is linked to living a fulfilled life, as well as to being a dutiful parent. Outside the home, several respondents described how running helped them be successful and productive at work. Katie described how staying fit and healthy helped give her energy to cope with her busy office job. This fits within a wider cultural narrative connecting running (and regular exercise in general) to productivity and 'self-optimization' (see, for instance, Constantino, 2017; Tate, 2015; Cederström and Spicer, 2017). Mike (a firefighter) and Clara (a police officer) emphasised the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle, including running, for both passing physical exams and staying in physical and mental shape to do their jobs well in physically demanding situations, for example:

If I'm going to go and arrest a 21-year-old boy, and he's gonna choose to fight I'm never gonna win... but I need to be strong enough and fit enough to fight with him long enough until someone else can come and help me.

*(Clara, 40 year old female police officer)*

Outside of specific social roles, Mark and Kerry (both journalists) described how leading a healthy lifestyle helped them feel more capable of looking after themselves and others in case of an emergency. Kerry used the (somewhat unlikely!) example of being involved in a plane crash in a remote location:

I like to be ready to go like should there be some kind of emergency I could run somewhere, I could be healthy enough to help people out in an emergency, or survive if necessary if crashing in an aeroplane or something.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*



All this talk of personal fulfilment, success and capability suggest that running can be understood as a 'self-betterment strategy' (Howell and Ingram, 2001: 343) in ways that reach far beyond physical health *per se*. Healthy bodies are seen as well-fitted to the social roles of modern life, facilitating success in numerous fields. They are, we are told: less likely to be ill and miss days off work; less likely to need support through disability benefits; more productive; more energetic; more focused; and more capable (see, for instance, Roth, 2014). In other words, healthy bodies are seen as enabling people to be the authors of their own lives rather than being society's passive dependents. This suggests that running provides an opportunity to expand personal autonomy. In this sense, healthiness can be understood as a form of physical capital, enabling mobility within a range of social fields. However, Foucault's notion of the 'docile body' provides another way of understanding the relationship between health and agency. Here, the healthy bodies generated through running are understood as the products of power, 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1995: 136) through discipline to take up 'useful' social roles in an unproblematic way. They are, in other words, highly structured bodies, engineered to serve distant goals around social progress or efficiency, not through coercion, but through being 'surrounded by biopolitical mechanisms that normalise, control and style the choosing subject towards [the] healthy, rational and responsible' (Mayes, 2016: 35). Healthy bodies can thus be viewed as expressions of both freedom and constraint.

As suggested by the large number of contexts in which health and fitness were described as valuable by my interviewees, the network involved in promoting healthy lifestyles ranges widely through society (see Rose, 2012). It includes the government, scientific researchers, medical professionals, employers and insurance companies, as well as gyms, personal trainers, magazines, websites and television programmes promoting longevity and self-care as well as the aesthetic of healthy living. And the influence of these interventions was apparent many times in my interviewees' references to particular books, pieces of research or television programmes about running and active lifestyles more generally – often to justify or explain their opinions or behaviours. Kerry's

comments about the plane crash might, for example, be linked to her mentioning that she had read a book called *Natural Born Heroes* (McDougal, 2015), which promotes functional fitness as a way of being a responsible, self-reliant citizen and contains some equally unlikely scenarios in which health and fitness save the day.

My interviewees' internalisation of the discourse of healthism was matched by their willingness to subject themselves to the regimes of self-monitoring and examination that Foucault (1995) described as central to modern disciplinary regimes. This was usually achieved through wearable biometric technology in the form of a watch that tracked their activity levels and heart rate, or apps which enabled them to track calories consumed and burnt. Several interviewees had their watch on during their interviews, and described religiously tracking their fitness and calorific intake by uploading data to apps on their computer or phone:

I'll look at my heart rate afterwards and then compare... and say well, how fit am I compared to say two or three months ago?

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, retired actuary)*

I trap all of my data... I look at it and I plan my training, so I'm very scientific about the way I build my training.

*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

I log what I eat, so... I was doing 1,200 calories a day, and if I was running and I would earn or I'd burn 350 calories I would then allow myself to eat the extra 350 calories.

*(Clara, 40 year old female police officer)*

Some interviewees liked to publish their data to a wider audience through social media such as Strava<sup>30</sup> thus voluntarily exposing their behaviours - and even biometric data such as heart rate - to the gaze of others. Publicising their data in this way opened it up to the normalizing gaze of others, helping to reinforce 'good' behaviours through social rewards such as receiving positive comments.

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<sup>30</sup> A website where runners share times and routes.

By no means all runners who collected this data published it online though. A number preferred to keep it to themselves, regarding it as private information.

Enmeshed in such a dense network around health and fitness it is easy to understand how the people I spoke to had internalised 'healthiness' as a central goal of self-care and guiding principle in their lives. Perhaps surprisingly though - in the light of research that identifies the need to minimise health care costs associated with an inactive, 'unhealthy' population as a key driver of healthism (see Mayes, 2016; Callahan, 2013; Singer, 2012) - only one interviewee (an economics graduate) explicitly linked running and healthy lifestyles to reducing the cost of healthcare provision. Robert acknowledged that leading a healthy lifestyle could be costly to the individual, but suggested there was a greater social good to consider:

I mean sport in general keeps you fit and I think we, as a society totally under-estimate the benefit of those benefits. Yes, it's costly to be engaged in sport, but - we don't know but I'm very sure that we make huge savings in terms of health costs, certainly later on in life.

*(Robert, 23 year old male student teacher)*

Robert's comment suggests that whilst the 'cacophony of guidance' (Mayes, 2016) around healthy living may obscure important political and economic objectives behind personalised goals for many people, there remains a strong drumbeat from government and allied institutions around the specific issue of the cost of poor health on the nation. An example of this, below, is taken from the rationale for Public Health England's One You campaign:

'Around 40% of all deaths in England are related to everyday habits and behaviours – such as... not being active enough... They also cost the NHS more than £11 billion every year.

By encouraging the nation's adults to take control of their health by... exercising more... One You will help them enjoy longer and healthier lives.' (Public Health England, 2017)

Of course, few people will have read the Public Health England website, but television programmes such as Channel 4's (2015) documentary, *NHS: 2 Billion a Week and Counting* and articles such as the Mail Online's *Sorry, why should the NHS treat people for being fat?* Plattel (2009) help to carry these ideas into everyday discourse. So, whilst a sense of responsibility to keep healthcare costs down is not acknowledged in most individual accounts of motivation around running, this kind of thinking can contribute powerfully to transforming a personalised ethic of healthy living into a moral yardstick against which to measure others. Failing to engage in practices that impinge only on personal well-being is one thing, but failing to make 'choices' that can reduce social costs borne by us all is quite another (see Throsby, 2012; Mayes, 2016). However, although several of my interviewees were highly critical of those who they saw as having unhealthy lifestyles, none referred explicitly to potential costs beyond those to the unhealthy people themselves. Again, this appears to suggest that healthism has been extremely successful in converting broad social and political goals into a morally charged ethic of self-care – a personalised responsibility towards the self that also says something of the quality of the person. Direct links with the social costs of choosing an 'unhealthy' lifestyle are unnecessary because the lifestyle is considered aesthetically ugly or of lesser value in itself.

One of the negative meanings associated with failure to engage in a 'healthy lifestyle' is around the idea of laziness. This only makes sense because it is taken for granted that a healthy lifestyle is intrinsically better than the alternative – why *wouldn't* you want to be healthy? - and that all people are equally free to exercise the choice to participate in healthy practices should they wish to do so. The identification of, on the one hand, laziness and poor decision making, and on the other, inactivity, unhealthiness and fatness is made plain in the interview excerpts below:

I don't go around saying you know, get off your bottom and do something, you know even the, you know, lazy ones in the village or whatever, but if I have that conversation I probably would encourage, because... I think it's really important.

*(Emma, 39 year old female nurse)*

It annoys me utterly to see people, you know on the news, who are completely unfit just because they're lazy, or they're just eating... I'm not going to go and tell random people you should be doing fitness... because I feel like people should be making their own choices about it. But I also feel that people should be making those choices to be fit.

*(Mark, 21 year old male trainee journalist)*

I can't understand why somebody else wouldn't [want to maintain a healthy lifestyle], I really can't. Why would you be obese? Why would you keep stuffing your face with all that food and finding it difficult to get up the stairs, and always have clothes that don't fit, and don't look well? You know it's, I meet people and - who are my age - and they probably look 10 years older. Why would you want that? Why would you do that to yourself? Dunno, can't figure it out.

*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

These comments appear to reflect an understanding of health as a product of relatively unimpeded choice. The belief that people are free to choose to follow a healthy lifestyle is implicit in the incomprehension expressed by Colin and the suggestions of laziness in all three comments, which emphasise personal choice rather than structural or other individual factors that might explain non-engagement in healthy practices. All these interviewees also take a dim view of people who fail to live up to their standards, describing them variously as undisciplined in their habits, incapable, looking bad and prematurely old, and 'wasting' their lives – as well as lazy. We can see in these excerpts how healthism has created not just an inward-looking ethic of self-care, but also a judgemental other-directed morality that views obesity as a failure of personal agency, something which, as Throsby (2007) has shown, is strongly felt – and is often resisted – by people classified as obese.

### **6.3 The healthy lifestyle aesthetic and class**

Despite the 'cacophony of guidance' around health in today's society and the prejudice often shown towards those who fail to live up to the norms it promotes, engagement in many healthy practices is far from universal.

Importantly, social factors such as gender, age and class play key roles in shaping participation rates. Turning to class in particular, numerous writers have described a link between socioeconomic position and engagement in healthy lifestyles, with the middle-class having much higher levels of involvement than less privileged groups (see Bourdieu, 2010; Crawford, 2006; Bennett et al., 2009). In part, this can be understood as a reflection of their higher cultural capital, which has been linked to a stronger disposition towards (and greater faith in the efficacy of) self-entrepreneurship, inculcated through early encouragement to engage in personal development, and affirmed through the rewards this investment reaps later on (see Ehrenreich, 1989). Health became a key target of this urge for self-making when it 'moved to the center of middle-class experience' during the 1970s and 1980s (see chapter 4; Crawford, 2006: 408), and has remained so ever since. Economic capital also plays an important role in generating class inequalities in healthy living. Not only are gym memberships and bicycles, health foods and yoga classes expensive, they also often require a significant degree of control over use of time that many people in working-class jobs or with heavy domestic or caring responsibilities cannot exercise. My interviewee, Colin, in perhaps a more reflective mood than described earlier, acknowledged how some forms of exercise (in these comments he is referring to triathlon) are effectively out of reach for many working-class people:

[At a championship race] you will not see a bike out there for less than £5,000. They're all, you know, your power meter costs you £1,000, your wheels cost you £1,500. Your - you know these are not top of the range, these are sort of entry - mid to entry level type stuff... Inevitably it is, it is an elite sport in many respects. You know a lot of the people I know who do it - you don't get many blue collar people doing this sport, because the travel, the equipment... Maybe that's a function of time to train as well.

*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

Colin was not alone in being aware of a classed element to participation in lifestyle sports. Several other interviewees stated they were 'lucky' to have the time to train because of autonomy at work, the ability to choose from a number

of potential jobs, or a well-paid partner who supported them economically. Bourdieu explained that this awareness – what he calls ‘practical mastery’ – of ‘what is likely (or unlikely) to befall – and therefore to benefit – an individual occupying a given position in social space’ (Bourdieu, 2010: 468) both guides individuals to choose particular practices (those ‘for the likes of me’) and also helps bestow the ‘social meaning and value of the chosen practice’ (ibid). Thus, through its unequal distribution in social space, healthy living in general and running in particular can become a performance of high cultural and economic capital, in other words, of comfortable middle-classness. This helps us understand the healthy lifestyle’s purely aesthetic appeal. Through its conformity to the norms and values of the culturally, economically and politically dominant groups that control the presentation of idealised lifestyles in our culture, healthy living offers a socially endorsed way to live a ‘beautiful’, ‘well-ordered’ and ‘fulfilled’ life. But what does this mean for those who lack the resources or inclination to participate?

We saw earlier how people perceived as unhealthy or unfit can be vilified as lazy, incomprehensible and – importantly – makers of bad choices. If, as suggested above, the distribution of healthy practices in social space disproportionately excludes those with less economic capital or leisure time - largely meaning the working-class (and women, as discussed in detail chapter seven) - we can see how these two understandings can combine to connect the negative characteristics of laziness and poor decision-making to being working-class. This fits with the work of Pelters and Wijma, (2016: 143), who suggest that the exclusion of sections of the working-class from the practices of ‘health worship’ may be creating a ‘new economic and health-related underclass’, who, under neoliberal conditions of ‘responsibilisation’, are regarded as having inflicted their predicament on themselves. The negative associations between unhealthiness and poor decision-making or laziness explored above are thus entangled with attitudes relating to class, creating a potent mix of prejudices that ‘target a specific group of people who are already, in some sense, second-class citizens’ (Herndon, 2005: 129).

## 6.4 Shaping the body

Perhaps the most visible and emblematic characteristic of this ‘health-related underclass’ (whether real or imagined) is fat. Bodies that are deemed to carry too much fat – those that are ‘overweight’ or ‘obese’ – also carry a great deal of symbolic baggage, being associated both with a failure of self-efficacy and personal discipline (see Throsby, 2016; Evans, Davies and Rich, 2008: Herndon, 2005), and with low social status (see van Amsterdam, 2013). Evidence suggests that negative attitudes about overweight people are more strident in social environments in which health and fitness are promoted (Powroznik, 2017; De Bruin et al., 2009; Smith and Ogle, 2006; Patel et al., 2003; Imm and Pruitt, 1991; Yates, Leehey and Shisslak, 1983). Once again, Colin’s interview provides a striking illustration to support this idea in the context of competitive running:

So, I think, probably not when I started the sport, but I have become a bit of a fatist. So, it's really interesting... you really start to notice, particularly when you get to my age, 52, most men my age, most people my age, men and women, are morbidly obese. You see them, and I cannot look at them.  
*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

Colin suggests it was only when he started running that he became ‘fatist’. Mark and Emma, who were quoted above, were also immersed in strong sporting cultures, Emma being a committed national level runner, and Mark a journalist for a fitness magazine. Greater engagement with the sporting field or wider fitness culture naturally leads to more exposure to the lifestyle network promoting health and slimness, and this could explain the intensification of pre-existing preferences for slim body shapes that are typical of (and help define) running’s middle-class participant base (see Abbas, 2004).

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, according to the BRS data 79% of runners are motivated by a desire to lose or maintain weight, representing a large majority within the sample. However, in the light of the entangled meanings of weight, health, fitness, class and beauty discussed above, we might expect that the needs and tastes behind this motivation would vary significantly from person to person. To a large extent I will rely on the interviews to unpick these meanings,



but we can find some signposts within the survey data. For instance, compared to the motivation of managing weight, a significantly lower proportion of respondents indicated they were motivated to improve their appearance through running. Only 64% of runners indicated this as a motivation. Taken at face value this suggests a group of runners exists – 21% of all runners - that is motivated to manage weight for non-aesthetic reasons. However, this leaves the majority of those seeking to manage weight through running also motivated to some extent by how running makes them look, seeming to imply a widespread aesthetic aspect to weight-management goals.

We can also explore differences in the social backgrounds of those motivated by the desire to manage their weight. Here we can observe notable differences around both gender and age. As mentioned above, women runners were significantly more likely to report a motivation around managing weight, at 85% of the sample, than men, at 70%. 42% of women compared to 28% of men indicated this was a strong motivation. Younger runners are also more likely to express strong motivations around managing weight, at 40% of those aged under 35 compared to 27% of people over the age of 55. As we might expect then, younger women are especially strongly motivated around weight management, with 45% reporting this as important. For both genders and all age groups, those who have regularly won medals and represented a club were markedly less likely to be motivated by a desire to manage weight (62%) than those who have not (85%) (also suggested by figure 5, page 152). In part, this might be explained by the fact that most successful competitive runners are already very slim, and may take their lean bodies for granted.

I will explore these important differences through my interview data in detail below. However, before that I want to shed some light on the relationship between body ideals and the field of running. In particular, I will use the BRS data to demonstrate the strong idealisation of 'running bodies' in the sample, as well as identifying the most valued characteristics of these bodies. I will also explore the idea suggested above, that the field of running may act as a site at which body ideals (particularly around slimness) are promoted and reinforced.

## 6.5 Bodies in the BRS data

The large number of runners surveyed whose participation was motivated by the desire to manage their bodyweight reflects a widespread understanding of running as a powerful means of ‘burning’ fat. Running’s fat burning credentials, promoted heavily in running and wider media, make it appealing to those in search of the slim physiques that, as described in chapter four, have been fashionable amongst the middle-classes for well over a century, and more recently have been tied to the potent force of healthism (see Bourdieu, 2010; Mayes, 2016; and Herndon, 2005). But more than ‘mere slimness’ running helps to generate “‘definition”... the outline of the body clearly enunciated in hard, though not exaggerated, curves of muscle’ (Ehrenreich, 1989: 236). This is a ‘standard of beauty... for women as well as men’ (ibid) that became a powerful aspirational ideal during the 1980s ‘fitness craze’ and remains so today. Furthermore, according to Abbas (2004), as well as simply a tool for achieving these culturally valuable body shapes, running may also contribute (along with the wider fitness culture) to generating these ideals. Here, an increasing cultural preference for a toned, athletic physique is explained (in part, at least) as a result of the proliferation of media around running that position running bodies as aspirational.

The strong relationship between how closely runners feel their bodies approximate the ideal for the sport and their satisfaction with their bodies is shown in figure 17. The close relationship between these two self-ratings from the BRS suggests that the idealised ‘runner’s body’ is a close analogue of wider physical ideals, although we should bear in mind that the data here reflects only the opinions of runners, who may have particular reasons for idealising the running form (discussed below).

The BRS data also allows us to identify the body characteristics most likely to be associated with both idealisations of the ‘runner’s body’ and with high levels of overall body satisfaction. Figure 18 shows the mean levels of two self-ratings associated with various body descriptors: There is clearly a close fit between how closely body self-descriptors match up to what runners perceive as a ‘running ideal’ and these runners’ overall body satisfaction. The characteristics most

associated with the runner's body and with high body satisfaction are: wiry, skinny, lean, slim and athletic. Those least associated with the runner's ideal were: overweight, plump, heavy and large. Based on this data, the presence or otherwise of body fat appears to be a key variable structuring both levels of body satisfaction and degree of fit with a running ideal.

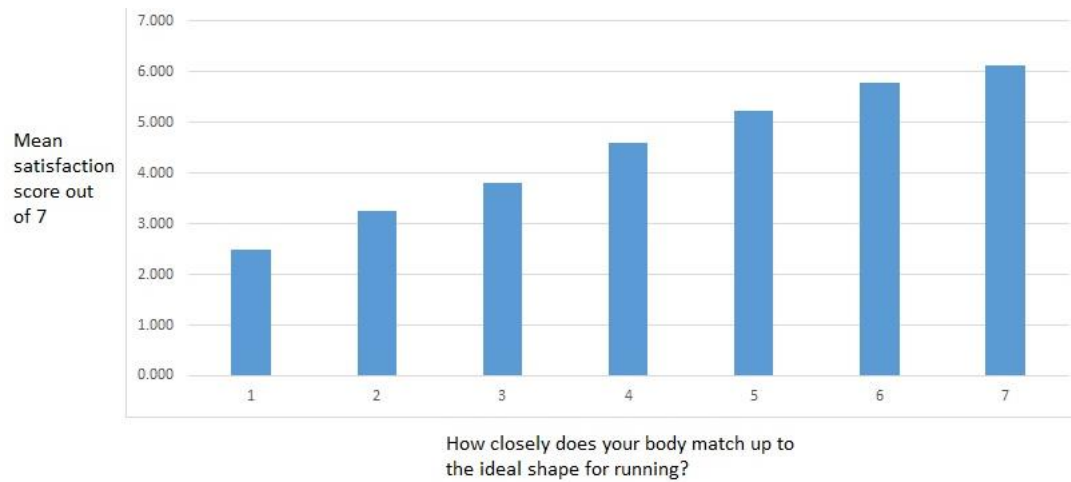


Figure 17: Mean self-rating for body satisfaction (out of 7) for runners grouped according to self-rating of their body's fit with a running ideal.

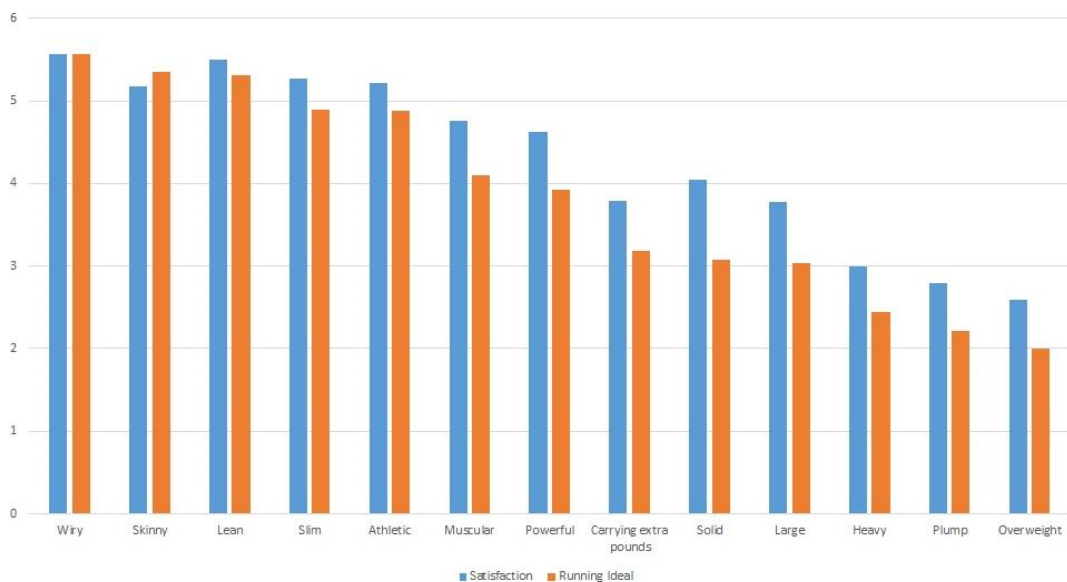


Figure 18: Mean body satisfaction and reported degree of fit with running ideal for respondents self-identifying with various body descriptors.

I have already mentioned above Abbas's (2004) research, which suggests that running culture may play an important role in shaping the body ideals of wider

society. We have also seen interview excerpts that seem to support the idea that people involved in running may have intensified negative perceptions of those who fail to live up to these ideals. Taken together these notions suggest that the field of running may be an important wellspring of mainstream body ideals, and that proximity to this ‘source’ has a powerful effect on the runners’ habitus with regards tastes and attitudes around the body. The BRS data enables us to explore this possibility by testing the hypothesis that participation in the field over time – which necessitates prolonged engagement with running’s discourse and norms - increases idealisation of the kinds of bodies associated with the sport.

Because the BRS does not provide longitudinal data, assessments of accuracy of this hypothesis can only be limited and should be treated with caution. However, there is some evidence that those who have spent a long time immersed in the

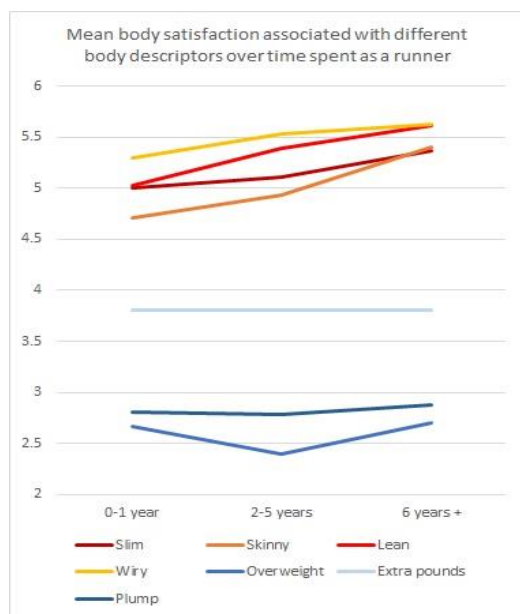


Figure 19: Relationship between body satisfaction and various descriptors for runners of different lengths of involvement in running.

field of running do indeed put a higher value on their own body traits when they are associated with the ideal runner’s body, such as ‘slim’, ‘skinny’, ‘lean’ and ‘wiry’, than do those who have just started running. The same is not true of descriptors such as ‘overweight’ or ‘plump’, whose low valuations remain low between these groups (see figure 19). This is indeed suggestive of the possibility that participating in the field of running could help reinforce the idealisation of the widely valued slim, toned physique.

And of course, this makes sense given that being slim is closely associated with – and thus a marker of - status in the competitive field of running.

If this data does reflect a shift in body ideals over time spent in the field of running, this would resonate with Throsby’s (2016) work on marathon swimming. This is another largely middle-class sport, but one in which a quite different body type is considered optimal for performance. Amongst long

distance swimmers body fat is encouraged and celebrated because of the advantages it bestows in terms of buoyancy and insulation in cold seas and rivers. In marathon swimming, Throsby reports, newcomers – particularly women - can sometimes struggle with the dissonance between the kind of body demanded and respected in the field and the wider cultural pressures to be slim. In the case of runners, of course, there is no such tension to manage; runners' bodies go with the flow of wider cultural norms rather than opposing them.

Using the BRS data we've seen that slim bodies are highly valued in the field of running, perhaps more so even than in wider society, which – particularly amongst the middle-class from which running draws so many of its participants - shares an admiration for the runner's physique. We've also seen comments from my interviewees that suggests that some highly engaged runners have particularly strong negative opinions about people who they regard as overweight. In part this apparent intensification of feelings around body shape and weight within the field may be an effect of the *doxa* of the field itself and the distribution of body properties within its status hierarchies. But of course, running, with its credentials as a weight management technique, also attracts people who are already disposed to value lean bodies highly, as suggested by the BRS finding noted earlier, that the majority of those involved in running are motivated to some extent by the desire to manage their weight. As we also saw earlier, these motivations were particularly strong for women. It is to issues of gender that I turn next.

## **6.6 Gender gap**

The higher salience of motivations around managing bodyweight for women is clear from the BRS data described earlier, with 42% expressing a strong disposition in this area, compared to 28% of men. Amongst bodyweight-focused runners, the data also suggests some gendered differences in the underlying goals sought through the management of weight. Women runners who are strongly motivated to manage weight are also more likely than not (55%) to have a strong motivation to improve their appearance through running, whereas their male counterparts are much less likely to rate improving their appearance as an important driver (31%). Conversely, 37% of these strongly bodyweight-motivated

men also have a powerful motivation to run fast times, compared to only 17% of similar women. What this seems to imply is that bodyweight is more closely related to appearance for women and to performance for men. As explored earlier in this chapter, the desire for physical health is also, no doubt, a powerful driver of weight management, linked as these two ideas are through discourse around healthy lifestyles.

The interviews clearly reflected and helped to make sense of these gendered differences in the salience and meaning of weight management amongst runners. Many of the women I spoke to described their weight and how they felt about it as a key driver of their involvement in running. Clara provides a powerful example of how important bodyweight can be to some women:

I do still worry about my weight. I weigh myself. I was weighing myself daily, I still weigh myself - I'm not weighing myself at the moment 'cos it's gone up too high and I don't wanna see it anymore. So, but I do try and I always weigh myself daily, I do calorie count, I am aware of what I consume, so that is a big part of my life, although I was really, really, really obsessed on it until I hit 40...

*(Clara, 40 year old female police officer)*

Kerry also described how self-perceptions around her weight were deeply connected to her desire to run. She also highlights the common association made between higher than desired bodyweight and perceptions of being 'fat':

I just don't like the idea of being really fat [laughs], like even right now like because I've been injured for the last six months I've put on four kilograms because I'm just not doing my usual [running], yet I'm still, like I've got more time to go to the pub, and more time to, like, go round people's houses and have nice meals, and you just put on weight. So even right now I feel like I'm overweight right now. Even though to most people's standards that's not overweight at all... The reason that I've put on weight is because I can't control what I eat, like, I'm greedy and I like food, so I like last night I ate six little chocolates, even though I knew that I wasn't hungry, I didn't need them, but I like the taste, so I just ate them.

And I can't run it off at the moment because of my injury. So that's why I've put on weight and it's really annoying me. I've gotta work out some will power, but I don't have any will power. That's why I run, to eat loads of cake and not worry about what I'm eating. But yeah, it does affect me. I'm sort of ashamed to admit it.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*

These women's strict self-monitoring and self-criticism around bodyweight, body fat and their eating habits reflect the social pressures on women in particular to retain a normative, slim figure throughout their lives. Whilst men may be facing increasing expectations and monitoring around how their bodies look in today's image-obsessed society (see Grogan, 2016), women remain the primary focus of its judgemental, shame-inducing gaze. The insecurities and self-monitoring this evokes are visible in the BRS data, which shows that women runners rated their body satisfaction significantly lower than men. On average, women scored their body satisfaction as 4.3 on a 7-point scale, whereas men rated theirs 4.8.

Unsurprisingly then, the theme of bodyweight ran through many of the stories women runners told about their involvement in running. My opening interview questions were designed to elicit a chronological narrative of each respondent's involvement in the sport. It was striking that none of the men I spoke to mentioned body image in these narratives, and only one (discussed below) mentioned bodyweight at all, whereas all but one of the women described their running histories with at least some reference to their bodyweight and feelings about it at particular times. Several spoke of how the goal of reducing their weight was the trigger for starting to run, for instance:

It started off being probably all about weight, and then became a bit of a physical need, and then became just a real enjoyment of being fit.

*(Jennifer, 37 year old female part-time private school teacher)*

I started hill walking... and started running again just to keep fit and lose weight. And from then on, I didn't stop.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

Others - like Emma and Olivia - described struggles with weight at various points in their lives:

After children I guess that was a little bit of a motivation, to lose weight and get - get kind of get more fit, and I have kind of fluctuated with weight a little bit, I've always been kind of lucky I've always been quite slim, but I think that's because I've always been very active.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

I have put on half a stone in weight in the last nine months, and I don't like that and I want to get rid of it, but that's really - I suppose it is about how I look, and I don't like feeling overweight...

*(Olivia, 48 year old female writer)*

Whilst women's narratives were often structured around (or at least punctuated by) responses to their bodyweight at various points in their lives, men's narratives were almost universally structured around sporting achievement. They often described how they started running because they were good at it at school, or because they were unable to continue with another sport because of injury or a lack of time. In the latter case, running was often positioned as a convenient outlet for a competitive personality. The only man who mentioned bodyweight in his personal narrative was Paul, a semi-retired doctor. But he described how he wanted to lose weight in order to improve his performance as a racer, not because he felt unhappy with being overweight *per se*. Weight management was thus framed in specifically competitive sporting terms:

The only way you can get faster than that guy [a rival] is just to do more, so you know, you start looking at your weight and your food, you start trying to lose a bit of weight, gain a bit of speed... and it becomes kind of self-motivating.

*(Paul, 60 year old male semi-retired GP)*

Later though, and only when pressed on this issue specifically, Paul did admit - *cautiously* - that his motivations around weight management were not purely sporting. They were also aesthetic:



I guess appearance is, you know, is important. And part of exercise, part of my motivation - a smallish part - but part of my motivation for exercising regularly is to keep my weight under control.

*(Paul, 60 year old male semi-retired GP)*

In this light, Paul's original sporting justification for his weight management might be playing a similar role to the 'scientific justification' used by male dieters studied by Mallyon et al. (2010). These men volunteered to take part in a clinical trial around weight loss, it is argued, because of the pretext this provided to 'excuse' dieting behaviour that they feared could be construed as 'a sign of weakness... a girl's thing' (335). Just as, 'for many men, dieting conflicts with masculinity and is perceived as vain or obsessive, which are read as feminine weaknesses' (335), so running targeting weight loss for its own sake may also jar with masculine norms. This can put men in a difficult position, when 'fatness can be taken as a sign of failure of control' and so exercising specifically to lose weight can be understood as 'an admission of... failure' (336). Men who want to lose weight in order to fulfil an ideal of controlled, disciplined masculinity may therefore feel the need to position their weight management practices within the acceptably masculine framework of competition. As Gill et al. (2005:38) argue, men's body projects are 'fraught with [these] difficulties... [they] must simultaneously work on and discipline their bodies while disavowing any (inappropriate) interest in their own appearance'.

Women, on the other hand, are well used to positioning their experiences 'within long [personal] histories of struggle with the diet industry, including exercise regimes' (Throsby, 2016:146). Just as was found by Wright, O'Flynn, and MacDonald (2006: 710) in their study, for the women I interviewed 'it was obvious that such talk came easily to them; they had rehearsed such conversations many times, probably with friends, whereas with... men this was clearly not the case'. This difference can be understood as a result of the narrower standards around body weight and fat women are held to (Broom and Dixon, 2008), which are reinforced in numberless subtle – and not so subtle – ways (see, for example, Mansfield, 2008). This social discipline, when internalised, makes self-monitoring and self-discipline around bodyweight an

important dimension of many women's lives. As Mallyon et al. (2010) found, unlike more reticent men, women openly discussed their dieting techniques and knowledge with both interviewers and each other. Body talk, far from something to hide or justify, was for these women an unproblematic part of the performance of feminine sociality.

However, and as I have mentioned, the fact that men did not readily proffer concerns around body image in the interviews does not necessarily mean that running's role in shaping their bodies was irrelevant to them. Whilst normative masculine orientations such as competition and athletic achievement may have been prioritised in their running narratives, all the men I spoke to acknowledged that they appreciated the effects of running on how they looked when asked directly. Even here though, a degree of caution in how ardently this was presented was clear:

Yeah, I suppose looking - looking fit is a large part of why people do it. And it obviously is, it's -it's part vanity, part natural, you know you want to look okay. It's not like you wanna be walking around with massive you know massive biceps or anything, but no-one wants to look out of shape.

*(Mark, 21 year old male magazine journalist)*

So, I think I have recognised that you know my leg shape has changed, you know I've got more defined muscles in my legs, and I think that's something that I think: That's cool... I guess I do get a bit of a hit out of seeing my legs are kind of, are a relatively nice shape... I guess I'm relatively happy with sort of my shape and I recognise that probably running has done part of that.

*(Robert, 23 year old male student teacher)*

The qualifiers 'I suppose' and 'I think I have recognised' that open these comments can be understood as the verbal equivalents of shrugs - suggestions that how they look has relatively low salience in terms of their motivations, or that they do not give such things much consideration. And the hedging continues throughout their comments. Across the men I spoke to, aesthetic considerations were played down or not discussed at all unless I directly asked them about this. We might interpret this as blasé posturing, a strategic move on the part of these

interviewees, designed to shield their hetero-masculine identities from insinuations of having an 'unhealthy' level of interest in their appearance.

These findings reflect how bodily self-care around running is performed in gendered ways that accommodate wider norms of, on the one hand, controlled, competitive masculinity and on the other, a femininity shaped by pressures for vigilance over, and aesthetic maintenance of, the body's appearance. This strongly echoes the findings of Wright, O'Flynn, and MacDonald (2006: 707), who described how for men 'health conflated with fitness as an embodied capacity to do physical work', in this case to do well in races or run very far, whereas for women 'health was a much more difficult and complex project associated with managing and monitoring practices associated with eating and exercise to maintain an "appropriate" body shape'. In a sense then, we can understand running that prioritises the aesthetic dimension of health and fitness as essentially feminised, and running primarily understood in terms of competition and performance as essentially masculinised. Both approaches revolve around imbuing the body with physical capital that is a source of distinction in a society that largely conflates ideas around health and fitness, and places a high value on both. The key difference between them is that feminised running can be understood as oriented around the *aesthetic* of fitness, and masculinised running around the *performance* of fitness.

## **6.7 The bigger picture**

The gendering of self-reported motivations around running is also reflected in the practices runners engage in. According to the BRS data, 43% of women race three or fewer times per year compared to just 25% of men, whereas only 15% of women compared to 33% of men surveyed race more than once per month on average. Men are also about 50% more likely to have represented a club in a race. Women runners, on the other hand, were twice as likely to report having regularly used dieting to manage their weight in the last year. To an extent, the forms of running men and women engage in also seem to fit this pattern. Whilst women are more likely to be joggers (i.e. runners with no competitive interest) and to participate in forms such as mud races, which often expressly promote a collaborative ethos (discussed later), men dominate the competitive forms of

running – particularly those that allow the most ostensibly extreme performances of fitness, such as ultra-marathon and fell-running (see figure 12, page 166).

In microcosm, this structuring reflects the wider field of sporting activities described in the previous chapter (see figure 1, page 106). Feminised sports/activities such as yoga, Pilates, aerobics and Zumba appeal to a habitus disposed towards a high degree of self-monitoring with regards body shape and fat, and which is not disposed to displays of competitiveness. (As discussed earlier, they also take place indoors, as does treadmill running, which is also more likely to be practised by women, by about 20%). At the masculinised end of the sporting field are activities like football and rugby, which offer ample opportunity for the performance of competitiveness and athletic prowess. In this sense, the data collected for this study helps to highlight the homologous nature of the fields that make up social space, with practices organised according to the same pervasive structural logic at the level of sporting leisure in general and within the microcosm of a single sport. Running, with its relatively even gender split, appears to be particularly flexible in this regard, allowing for a wide range of differently gendered dispositions and tastes to be embodied and performed through different ways of practising the sport.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

Running has been a part of regimes for physical self-improvement for centuries. From ancient Greece to the Victorian public schools, privileged young men in particular were encouraged to run as a way to build physical capital and vitality and to counterbalance or complement intellectual work. In recent times rising levels of affluence and increasingly sedentary lifestyles have been linked to increased incidence of ‘hypokinetic diseases’ and obesity, helping to transform running into a mainstream activity practised by millions of people in the UK alone as a way of losing weight and staying healthy. A driver for this increase in participation has been the powerful neoliberal discourse of ‘healthism’ (see Poulson, 2016; Mayes, 2016), in which responsibility for achieving a healthy society is delegated from the state to individual citizens. This has lent healthy activities such as running a moral aspect. Making the choice to run is seen as a

*responsible* choice. It is good for the self, but it is also good for society. Healthy people are perceived as more capable across a range of domains, and less of a burden in terms of their demands on health services. With the increasing moral value attached to bodily management, markers of failure to engage in such healthy behaviours, particularly being overweight or obese, have come to be associated with immorality, fecklessness and laziness. These social conditions provide a powerful motivational environment for participating in running. Not only does it address existential fears around illness and morbidity, it also provides a way to enhance aesthetic physical capital, to perform responsibility and self-discipline, and to display physical capability. As such, running can be an important part of the performance of a beautiful (and high status) healthy lifestyle.

This chapter has shown that different groups emphasise some of these aspects or interpretations over others. Whilst an overarching concern with health and fitness unites almost all runners, what this translates into in terms of the practices they engage in and the motivations they acknowledge varies significantly, particularly according to gender. Men tend to couch their rationales in the language of competition, athleticism and ‘feats’ that demonstrate their physical capital, health and fitness. Women, on the other hand, often emphasise the desire to look a particular way, positioning running within narratives of weight management.

Characterising running as a practice of self-entrepreneurship aimed at socially desirable ends also helps explain running’s strongly middle-class demographics. Unlike other sports such as football, golf or tennis, which offer instant gratification in terms of fun, sociality and competition, running – whether to lose weight, get healthy or run faster – is almost entirely focused on the incremental, long-term pursuit of individualised and embodied goals. It is ascetic, in that it demands discipline and – in order to maximise benefits – requires that indulgences are foregone. Running, particularly in its non-competitive forms, therefore represents a near perfect example of what Foucault called a ‘technology of the self’, a practice ‘which permit[s] individuals to effect by their own means... operations on their own bodies and souls... so as to transform

themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness... perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1982: 18). This kind of disciplined self-making has been described as a hallmark of the middle-class habitus (see Herndon, 2005). It is forged in the light of 'the white-collar, professional employment that largely defines class membership' (Fletcher, 2008: 317), and which demands extended periods of education and professional development to ensure a slow climb up the career ladder. As Ehrenreich (1989: 84) argues, 'the challenge of middle-class childraising—almost the entire point of it, in fact - is to inculcate . . . the deferred-gratification' habitus that equips middle-class children to ascend into middle-class jobs. Leading, as Stempel (2005:415) describes it, to the internalisation of 'the disposition to view one's self as a project to be continuously improved and developed.'

But this is not simply an issue of taste or disposition. The long-term discipline required to shape the body through running may have few direct economic costs, but it does require a significant investment of time. To be able to dedicate the hours needed to have a discernible impact on bodily health and appearance requires control over large periods of 'leisure' time and the spare energy to be able to take advantage of it. For those working long or irregular hours in physically demanding (i.e. working-class) jobs, or for those tied to demanding work at home or caring for others, this can be a significant barrier. As such, engaging in the 'serious leisure' (Elkington and Stebbins, 2014) of running can be understood as a form of privilege, where socioeconomic advantages are put on display in a public performance of 'healthiness' and what Veblen (2007) described as 'conspicuous leisure'. McNay (1994: 133-134) argues, that this kind of 'stylisation of daily life' can amount to no more than 'an amoral project for privileged minorities'. But it is more than that: Differences in the ability of rich and poor to access health-giving practices such as running regularly constitute an important part of the explanation for the stark and classed health inequalities in the UK today (see Baker et al. 2017).

Whether we regard the pursuit of health and fitness - and its symbols – through running as a socially responsible act of self-discipline or an individualistic vanity project and expression of social status (or both), it is clear that the desire to

manage the biological self in terms of both body shape and other markers of health, is a key driver of participation in running. In the next section though, we turn to look at running as a sport. Here self-discipline and self-making in relation to the body are at least as important as they are for those wanting to lose weight or improve their health, but the focus is on rewards within the specific local context of racing and competition. Success here is achieved through cultivating levels of specific types of physical capital far in excess of those needed to qualify as 'healthy' by more general standards. So how can this investment be justified? And to whom does it appeal?

## Chapter 7: Findings III

# Out in the field: Running as sport

### 7.1 Moments of truth

As we saw in the previous chapter, for many people, practising running is closely bound up with the desire to exercise self-care around bodily appearances, health and fitness. But we also saw that for many runners – and particularly men – appearing or feeling fit and healthy was not enough. For these runners it was demonstrating or *performing* fitness that appeared to be especially important. In the world of running, fitness can be performed in numerous ways, but it is racing that offers the most public and socially validated stage on which to lay claim to this attribute. Races offer sites at which a form of performative fitness is measured, ranked hierarchically, institutionally validated and communicated publicly.

But races are more than just opportunities to trumpet one's fitness. They are the defining moments when the distinctive forms of physical capital associated with running are converted into the symbolic capital associated with the sport. This symbolic capital is of limited transposability – it carries relatively little weight in wider social space for all but a few elite athletes - yet it demands a huge investment of time and effort to achieve. This suggests a wholehearted commitment to the field's *illusio* by its participants. And as we shall see, for committed runners the pursuit of this form of symbolic status can come to dominate and structure their entire lives. For other race participants more focused on improving their health or losing weight, the *illusio* holds a weaker grip, but can still provide an additional motivation for maintaining commitment to a regular regime of running. Over the course of the chapter that follows I will explore the competitive dimension of running practice in depth, examining who runs this way, why, and what success in the field of competitive running means in wider culture.



The MCA plots in figures 5 and 6 (pages 152 and 153) showed that competitive motivations (doing well in races, running fast times) and practices (participating in lots of races, winning medals, representing a club, receiving coaching) make up a distinctive cluster within the field of running generated from the BRS data. As suggested by the location of the gender markers on these charts, this cluster is strongly associated with male runners, with almost double the proportion of men citing doing well in races as a very important motivation compared to women (30% to 16% respectively). Age is also a factor, with runners strongly motivated to do well in races and run fast times on average five years younger than those unmotivated in this way (40 years to 45 years respectively). As we shall explore later, class may play a subtle role here too. The BRS data also points to other practices associated with competitive runners, who run more frequently, spend more money on the sport, and have higher rates of club membership, club leadership, social involvement with fellow runners and engagement with wider running culture. As suggested by the location of the competitive cluster on the 'engagement' dimension in figure 5 (horizontal axis), competitive runners tend to be deeply immersed in the sport.

Over the course of this chapter I will drill deeper into the BRS data to help refine this picture, and will draw on interview data to help discern what these patterns mean in terms of runners' lived experience, how they emerge, and what role they play in reproducing social inequalities and in distinguishing social groups. What follows is broken into sections focused on three key themes: Entry and engagement; training, discipline and control; and rewards and meaning.

## **7.2 Entering and engaging with the field**

### **7.2.1 Formative years**

The important role of gender in determining degree of engagement with competitive running appears to suggest that men are more receptive to the *illusio* of the competitive field - the 'fundamental belief in the... game, and the value of the stakes' (Bourdieu, 2000: 11). From a Bourdieusian point of view, this male proclivity for competition in running needs to be understood largely in terms of the social experiences that shape the normative masculine and

feminine habitus in different ways<sup>31</sup>. In this first section I want to explore some of the ways this differential inculcation might be effected during childhood.

Figure 20 shows the mean combined competitive motivation scores (doing well in races and running fast times) for all runners in the BRS survey, divided into groups based on gender and running history. The 'since childhood' group are runners who have run consistently since childhood. 'Hiatus' includes runners who were competitive runners as children but stopped, only taking up running again in later life. 'Adult starters' only started running regularly as adults.

As one would expect following Bourdieu – who argues time spent in a field (particularly in childhood) adapts one's habitus to its values and *doxa* - there is a clear relationship between childhood engagement with the competitive field of running and adult competitiveness. Both the 'since childhood' and 'hiatus' groups report greater competitive motivation than those who were not involved in the field during their youth. Certainly, this could be used to support the idea that early immersion in the field of running adapts the participant's habitus to fit with its competitive values and *illusio*, although alternative explanations are possible (e.g. talented runners may be more likely to be competitive and more likely to have run as children). I will explore this further using the interview data below.

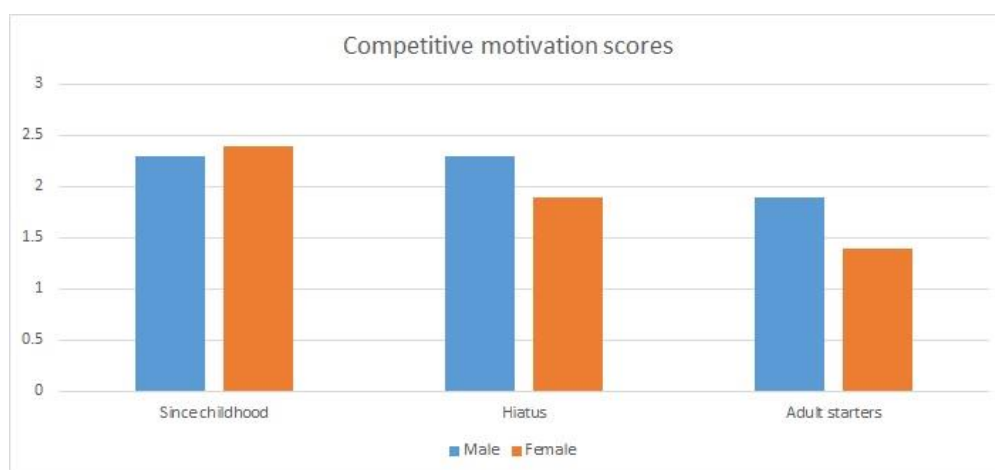


Figure 20: Combined competitive motivation scores by gender and childhood running continuity.

<sup>31</sup> Gendered differences in terms of access to and power over resources (including time) obviously also play an important role here, and will be discussed at length later.

Figure 20 suggests that we need to think more subtly about the simple idea that men are more likely to be competitive than women. We can see that women who have run continuously since childhood show about the same level of competitiveness as equivalent men. It is also important to note that the strength of the effect of childhood experiences varies markedly by gender. For men, the difference in competitiveness scores between adult starters and continuous runners is only 21%, whereas for women it is 71%. In other words, there is far less variation in men's competitiveness scores than women's when it comes to differences in childhood experiences in the sport. These findings chime with the work of Giuliano, Popp and Knight (2000) who found a strong relationship between girls' degree of engagement in competitive games and sports in childhood and their subsequent likelihood of participation in competitive athletics as young adults.

### **7.2.2 Gender, competition and childhood experiences**

In making sense of these findings we need to turn to research on gender, and in particular dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Prevailing models of idealised masculinity emphasise physical prowess and bodily competence of the kind performed through competitive sport. This has been described as a '[translation] into the language of the body of the social relations which define men as holders of power, women as subordinate' and that through assertions of physical prowess 'the superiority of men becomes "naturalised"' (Connell, 1983: 28). Athletic contests (as opposed to simply going for a jog) offer prime opportunities for the performance of these masculine qualities.

The close relationship between competitive sport and masculinity in modern culture is highlighted by Trujillo (1991: 2), who suggests, 'perhaps no single institution... has influenced our sense of masculinity more than sport'. In this context, displays of athleticism by women can be viewed as problematic or transgressive – they are expressions of a 'misalignment' between sex and normative gender expectations, and can lead to assumptions about sporting women's sexualities or their tagging as 'tomboys' (see Redelius, Fagrell and Larsson, 2015; Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005). Whilst some women athletes feel able to embrace these non-normative femininities, others, it is

argued, feel obliged to work hard at an 'apologetic defence' of their femininity, by deploying aspects of emphasised femininity such as long hair, makeup and feminine clothing; others use a 'reformed apologetic defence' which revolves primarily around asserting their heterosexuality (see Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005). But for many women, these conditions appear to generate an aversion to physically competitive sport, internalised as a key part of their (normative) gender identities.

In this light the lower mean levels of competitive orientation in female runners make sense. Norms around 'heteronormal' femininity can restrict women's displays of athletic competence and dominance (see Butler et al. 2014; Connell, 1983). However, this begs the question of how the experience of participating in the field as children appears to 'immunise' some women against these expectations as adults. Also, we need to establish what factors enable a minority of girls to engage with the field during childhood and, importantly, adolescence - a time of life characterised by pressure not to put the body into fluid, directed, competent motion in competitive sport, particularly in the presence of boys (see Redelius et al. 2015).

Jacqui's interview provides an illustration of the kinds of experiences that may help facilitate overcoming these restrictive norms. For her, an encouraging father who immersed her in sport from a young age was key to her developing what Bourdieu calls the 'feel for the game' of competitive sport that has helped her become an elite level runner and junior World Champion duathlete:

I think dad when he was young, I don't think he necessarily had all the opportunities he wanted to have, so when he saw that all the opportunities out there... he was always really like, 'come on let's go and do these things'. Obviously we all want to do them, it wasn't a case of he was dragging us along, it was we all wanted to do it. So yeah, he was very, very supportive and obviously gave up an awful lot of time, which probably when you're young you don't really realise quite you know the amount of investment and time that your parents are putting into you.  
*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

She explains how the commitment and physical ability developed as a result of her parents' encouragement and support made her catch the eye of coaches from a local triathlon club. Whilst many of her friends had no interest in competing, she was keen to pursue the opportunity to train with the club:

It was a part of our PE lessons, a few sort of coaches would come in and do a triathlon session. I mean, I suppose I've always, so I've done swim club and swimming lessons from a quite a young age, so I've been swimming lots of you know multiple times a week, I mean before I was ten I was doing so many different sports, you know, in the holidays it was hockey, netball, korfbal, diving, gymnastics, you know my parents just took me, you know, they took all of us to everything to try loads of different things out so I suppose I was really quite fit compared to I suppose my peers, and so obviously then, you know, in the triathlon club sort of sessions I kind of showed - but also I wanted to do it - like a lot of my friends, they really weren't interested in it.

*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

As similar story of parental encouragement and opportunity is told by Emma, who also went on to run at elite level:

Emma: I started running at school I guess, that's the main thing. My mum was a tennis coach, so we did tennis quite a lot, so in regards to the relevance that's probably us keeping active from early age, from age of six. But school was running... and I was good at it, so I was pushed at doing it... So, I guess that was my first memory of running, at school and just - just running with tennis and running - just keeping active I think that was very much my upbringing.

Interviewer: And when you say it was your upbringing, did your parents or your family members encourage you to participate - did they take you to clubs, kind of introduce you to different things?

Emma: Yeah, my parents were very keen to take us to clubs... we are more kind of I guess more sporty people - sporty as a family rather than more academic, so I don't remember so much like sitting

down and doing my homework, I always remember going to netball clubs or going to running clubs and we were very much encouraged to do that kind of thing.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

All the highly competitive women I spoke to told similar stories. They were encouraged in and introduced to sport early, had strong parental support (or experienced strong parental pressure), and had opportunities to compete in running through school that led to engagement with a local club. These experiences appear to have shaped their habitus in ways that gave them a sense of being at home in competitive sporting fields, and gave them a pride in their athleticism which shielded them from the influence of the contradictory norms around femininity and sports participation described by Redelius et al. (2015), Throsby (2016), Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, (2005) and others. This resistance to the embodiment of normative femininity – which positions women as the ‘opposites’ of dominant, competitive, athletic men - is captured in Jacqui’s comment below:

I just feel I'm in a group of people running high mileage. I don't really think, you know, obviously I'm a girl, but I don't really think like I shouldn't be doing this because, you know, I'm a girl and I'm not as strong or I'm not as fast. I don't really think like that.

*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

For Jacqui then, runners are runners and gender doesn’t come into it. She describes her body in terms of its running prowess – as a runner’s body, not as a *female* runner’s body. This ungendered or androgynous view of the female sporting body chimes with that of female marathon swimmers researched by Throsby (2016:146). She describes how participation in this other endurance sport ‘moves men towards masculinity... [whilst] pushing women further away from normative femininity’. She quotes a female swimmer who, perhaps similarly to Jacqui, ‘thought of [herself] as quite an androgynous person’ whilst in training. For men, serious sport is a means through which normative gender identities can be reinforced, whereas women can find their ability to perform normative femininity undermined, moving them into a more ambiguous gender

position. The de-feminised gender performativity of serious women athletes was noted in another regard by Kerry, a serious runner, who perceived her fellows as possessing more 'manly' characters than other women:

I suppose like at the top [of the sport] the women would be quite similar to the men, I think. Like I've got a good friend... and she's quite kind of standoffish and like reserved, so a bit more kind of a bit more manly in character, and I really like her 'cos like we'll say to each other "ah, you did well there" and she'll be like "yeah, I did" like that, and we take the compliment. We don't go "oh no, we're terrible" like that, it really annoys me... I think women are allowed to be a little bit less competitive.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*

And in the light of the gender norms discussed above, women can be understood not simply as being 'allowed' to be less competitive and committed, but as being actively policed to deter the display of these inappropriately masculine characteristics.

### **7.2.3 The role of class in early experiences**

If engagement with sporting opportunities in childhood is an important factor for women in the emergence of gender identities that challenge feminine norms, it seems likely that families with the resources of time and money to facilitate their children's involvement in sport (paying club fees, buying equipment, transporting them to matches) will be more likely to produce competitive female runners.

And indeed, studies have shown this to be the case (see Wheeler, 2014; Bennett, Lutz and Jayaram, 2012). All the highly competitive women runners I spoke to had had ample opportunities to participate in sport offered to them as children, and all came from upper-middle-class<sup>32</sup> backgrounds. All but one of them had gone to an independent school that offered significantly enhanced PE facilities and support. The powerful link between private education and sporting success has been highlighted in relation to Team GB's medallists at the recent Rio Olympics, a third of whom had gone to independent schools (Weale, 2016),

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<sup>32</sup> Having established professional or higher managerial occupations within their immediate families and/or private education.

despite only 7% of the student population being privately educated (Garner, 2015). In some cases, my respondents had attended all-girl schools, which may also have been a factor in terms of reducing the pressure to conform to heteronormative feminine stereotypes during PE lessons described by Redelius et al. (2015; also see Burns, 2017).

What this suggests is that given opportunities and encouragement, girls can develop a strong athletically competitive habitus that is comparable to that of similarly socialised boys. A supportive, sport focused (and resource rich) home and school environment help to inculcate this disposition, which appears to armour girls and women against the internalisation of self-effacing feminine norms around sport, part of what Connell (1987) described as 'emphasised femininity'. Without this process adult women runners appear much less likely to engage in the competitive field. In this light, whilst girls remain under-engaged in PE at school and sport outside it (Flintoff, 2008; Burns, 2017), it is unsurprising that the proportion of competitively motivated woman runners in adulthood remains relatively low.

#### **7.2.4 Competitiveness amongst adult starting runners**

As we saw in figure 20 (page 208), men who start running in adulthood report markedly higher competitive motivations than equivalent women. Paul, who took up running in his early 50s, and now 60, competes at a local level, provides an example of the competitive focus of many late-starting men:

Invariably once you start running in a running club it then starts to become a bit competitive... you're surrounded by people and there's people faster than you and there's people slower than you, and if you have this kind of mind-set that I have, then you kind of want to be faster than [a club mate], and then when you're faster than him you want to be faster than [another club mate], and you know there's that kind of motivation there.

*(Paul, 60 year old male semi-retired GP)*

Paul is not an elite runner. He trains a couple of times each week, and typically finishes several minutes behind the leaders in the 5k and 10k races he enjoys.



However, beating those around him, or people he considers rivals such as those in his age group, remains a key motivator:

I guess you can tell I'm quite a competitive person, and so a main motivator to me is going faster than other people and beating my own times.

*(Paul, 60 year old male semi-retired GP)*

Paul didn't run seriously as a boy, but sport was always a big part of his life and identity. As a tall, rangy youth he had been encouraged to join the school's rowing team. Over the years he developed into a strong rower, winning many races and was eventually picked for the Great Britain team. After competing at a high level for many years Paul moved to a new job in a city far from a good boating river. He was forced to give up rowing, but took up running as a second-best option – he didn't need to learn any new skills (as he would in many other sports) and there were minimal barriers to getting started and feeding his 'mind-set' for competitive sport. A similar story is told by Colin, who was forced to switch from local level rugby after an injury in his 30s. Both men had been immersed in competitive sport since childhood, and when their primary sports became inaccessible, they turned to running. Some of their reasons for seeking an alternative sport were around keeping fit and finding an outlet from stressful jobs, but both emphasised the importance of continuing to feed their desire for competition - their competitive habitus - internalised through the years spent in other sporting fields.

Unlike for the competitive women runners discussed earlier, there are no difficult contradictions between normative male gender identities and participation in physical competition or displaying athleticism to resolve. For boys and men, involvement in physically competitive sports fits neatly into the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) as unproblematically 'masculine-male-hetero'. Indeed, as discussed above, athleticism and competitiveness have been described as core ideals characterising 'hegemonic masculinity' (see Trujillo, 1991). Paul and Colin provide illustrations of how throughout their early lives, boys are 'schooled' in this dominant, physically competitive form of masculinity. Their habitus thus prepared, as adults they – like many other men – could take to

competition in the field of running like 'fish to water', to use Bourdieu's favoured simile. This confidence may also be reflected in men's high appraisals of their own level of physical competence in running: The BRS data show that whilst women rated their running talent as on average 3.5 on a 7-point scale, men rated theirs as 4.2.

According to the BRS data, the vast majority of women who come to running in adulthood have little or no competitive motivation for taking part. Amongst those who started running in the last two years only 4% cite doing well in races as a strong motivation compared to 20% of similar men. On the other hand, 93% of these women report wanting to lose weight as a strong or moderate motivation. Tina came to running in her 20s and – then as now, aged 38 – her motivation was centred on managing her weight. She has participated in numerous races including the London Marathon, but for her this was not about competition, but primarily to provide a motivation to stick to a regular running pattern:

I started [running] when I started doing the Race for Lifes [sic], so I started with a 5k Race for Life. Walking, with my mum and there was like - everyone else is running these, I can run these. Then started doing lots of 5ks, and then... I'd have to have something to enter... When I was training for something... it meant that I got out and I knew I was gonna do it... I made one of my friends at work [sign up to race too]. So, I suppose yeah, I've always used it as a social mechanism... it makes me go - I don't know why.

*(Tina, 38 year old female IT manager)*

Tina used commitment to races and running partners as a 'Ulysses Pact' – a voluntary social contract designed to bind her to future actions. She was pleased if she achieved a new best time, but regarded this as very much a bonus rather than a motivation in itself. This testimony provides a good example of how runners can participate at the fringes of the competitive field – i.e. by signing up for occasional races and building small amounts of symbolic capital objectified in race finishers' medals – without any real desire to engage in competition for its own sake. They obtain relatively small rewards from the field, but it provides a

reference point to help structure their running. Their primary goals, however, lie elsewhere, usually in terms of health, fitness and aesthetic benefits.

### 7.2.5 Going native

Although Tina’s lack of competitive engagement is typical of adult starting women it does raise some questions from a theoretical point of view. Following Bourdieu, one might expect her long-term involvement in the field (albeit at its fringes) to have led to a gradual internalisation of its competitive ethos, the field eventually becoming a ‘transcendent universe, imposing its own ends and norms’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 151). If, as we have seen, young people who compete within the field appear to develop an enduring competitive focus, we might expect those who join as adults to experience a similar - though perhaps less powerful - effect. Is there evidence for an ‘inculcation effect’ in the wider data? Table 6 addresses this possibility. Whilst we must remember that this is an asynchronic snapshot rather than a diachronic picture of change in individuals over time, it suggests an intriguing distinction between men and women in how competitive motivation develops with exposure to the sport. Whilst men who start running as adults and have five or more years’ experience report only slightly higher motivation to do well in races than those new to the field (about 12% higher), there is a dramatic difference between the competitive motivations of women who have started recently compared to those involved in the sport for a longer period (a 69% jump).

Years running	Mean 'To do well in races' motivation			
	Female	Net change	Male	Net change
less than 2	0.435		0.864	
2 to 4	0.679	(+56%)	0.992	(+15%)
5 or more	0.736	(+69%)	0.965	(+12%)

*Table 6: Mean motivation ‘to do well in races’ (out of 2) for adult starters with different levels of running experience.*

These figures could suggest that long-term engagement in running can, for some women at least, lead to an internalisation of a competitive ethos that displaces the broader feminine norms that initially inhibit physical competitiveness. Men, on the other hand, coming to the field already predisposed towards competition,

show only a relatively small increase over time. Digging further into the data we find the proportion of women adult starters who are strongly motivated by doing well in races goes from 4% for runners in their first two years, up to 15% for those with at least five years' experience. One such woman, Olivia, who started running in her 30s, provides an illustration of how this transformation can play out in an individual life:

I remember [the first time] we ran, I think it was probably 200 or 300 meters down the street to the lamppost, and we had to walk back. I mean it was - and I thought I was quite fit... so I suddenly thought I'm gonna have to do something... So I did, I did the couch to 5k running plan... and stayed running on a treadmill for about a year... [Then] I went for my first outdoor run, found it really difficult but I had a personal trainer at the time... and she started training me to do a 10k. So did my first 10k... I really loved it... So it was the usual progression. So you start with... road races, you think you're never gonna do more than a 10k, then you do a half-marathon, then you think well I may as well try a marathon, so you do a marathon... the first fell-race I did... it's a 10k over Burley Moor... and it was just - I mean it was hard. But I absolutely loved it... I'm not a very good fell-runner but I'm quite determined and I've done quite a lot of big, really tough races... So yeah, even though I'm never gonna win a race, ever... I've won one prize, and I've won a spot prize, [despite the fact that fell-races] are much, much tougher for women. That's fine, you just have to beat [the men]... I think, yeah there are some people who I might think I should be beating, but it doesn't matter because I might beat them at the next race and, you know, that's fine.... And I'm the only woman in the club's history who's done [a famous fell race], and I'm really proud of that.

*(Olivia, 48 year old female writer)*

Olivia's experiences, in contrast to Tina's, describe a gradually increasing engagement with the field, with a simultaneous shift in goals and meaning. From running simply to get fit and lose weight to aiming to beat others and achieve distinctive athletic feats, Olivia does appear to have internalised the *illusio* of the

field over time. It appears that a proportion of women who come to the sport as adults follow this path, but they are a minority.

Whilst Olivia, who has become more competitively focused, and Tina, who despite running for a long time has not become motivated in this way, might take part in the same races, the meaning they give them is very different. How can we explain this difference sociologically? A clear difference between the two women is that Olivia joined a running club, whereas Tina has always run with friends. Olivia joined her club after only her second race, and cites this as a pivotal moment in the transformation of how she approached running:

[I] signed up for another 10k... run by a running club called [her running club]. It's a really nice run, though the woods, and they were really friendly and so I thought, right I'll join, I'll join that. So I joined a running club... and I've been with them ever since. So that's probably the most fundamental thing I did to be a more committed runner I would say.

*(Olivia, 48 year old female writer)*

The BRS data supports the idea that membership of a club or informal group is linked to a higher level of competitive focus amongst adult starting women, although we should be cautious about what this implies, as it is likely that more competitive women are more likely to join clubs. What this clearly does show, however, is that clubs and running groups are social environments in which one is more likely to come into contact with competitively-oriented women and where a speed and performance-based *illusio* holds sway. It may be that over time, this exposure to a social setting where status in the field is celebrated and respected (where its symbolic capital has especially magnified effect) precipitates a shift in the habitus towards a more competitive disposition.

### **7.2.6 Section conclusion**

Over this section we have seen how two important factors help shape the overall gender structuring of competitive running. First, the low competitive motivation amongst adult starting women compared to similar men; and second, the lower number of women entering the competitive field as children. Many researchers have argued that rates of girls' and women's involvement in many competitive

sports are suppressed as a result of their internalisation of the normative model of femininity. This way of doing gender is reproduced through common school and family experiences in childhood as well as wider culture throughout adult life. Even well-meaning attempts to encourage girls to participate more in PE at school can end up reproducing these norms, for instance a recent attempt by a school to engage girls in sport involved offering three 'pathways' described by Burns (2017) in a BBC online article:

'The girls-only pathway is tailored to boosting levels of confidence.

There will be a bit more aerobics, dance, being inside in the winter. So they're not turned off by being outside in the rain and cold.

More sporty girls are offered a mixed programme with the less athletic boys - this might involve dodgeball, football and more competitive games.

And sporty boys have a boys-only programme.'

Note here that both pathways available to boys involve competition, whereas only some of the girls will experience this, and only in a toned-down way with 'less athletic' and presumably less competitive (as they have chosen to avoid the 'sporty' programme) boys. 'Sporty boys' are siphoned off into their own, exclusive category, whilst non-competitive girls are trained in forms of physical education like aerobics, which are primarily focused on managing body shape. The message seems clear – it is masculine to compete, and feminine to focus on how you look. Boys and girls that fail to fit this binary are lumped together in an ambiguous third category, neither fully masculine nor fully feminine. Thus, even supposedly progressive school physical education programmes designed to increase girls' participation in sport can in fact be a source of symbolic violence, perpetuating gender stereotypes and possibly helping to entrench inequalities in sports participation in later life.

That said, we have seen that lower levels of competitiveness in women are far from inevitable, particularly for those who have engaged with a competitive

sporting field from a young age. Women who participated in serious running as children retain similar competitive outlooks to men in adult life. And amongst those women who started running regularly as adults, there is evidence that long-term participation can sometimes lead to a shift towards a more competitive disposition. This may be connected to engagement with field-based social communities – clubs and groups around running that hold more positive values regarding women’s physical competitiveness, and accordingly offer greater symbolic rewards for doing well in races. Without involvement in these sites and practices in youth and afterwards, which provide a space in which women’s performances of masculinised competitiveness and athleticism are normalised and celebrated, women’s competitive engagement remains significantly (t-test,  $p < 0.001$ ) lower than that of men.

### **7.3. Training and commitment**

#### **7.3.1 A disciplined life**

Building the sporting body is a project ‘whose finite point is never reached’ (Throsby, 2016: 28), a Sisyphean task requiring the perpetual repetition of athletic labour in the form of long-term and often rigid training and lifestyle programmes that can colonise large tracts of runners’ daily lives. Bale (2000: 90) suggests that ‘the clock is a powerful simile for athletes’ lives, let alone their training’, with days, hours, minutes and seconds carefully managed and allocated in repetitive routines designed to maximise specific forms of embodied physical capital. This is reflected in the BRS data, which shows that competitive runners run much more frequently and are more engaged with other training practices than non-competitive runners. 42% of the most competitive group run at least 5 times per week compared to only 15% of their non-competitive counterparts. 70% of the most competitive runners take part in a race at least once every two months on average, compared to only 24% of the least competitive group. Amongst the most competitive runners 18% claimed to diet regularly to improve performance (a further 33% did so occasionally) compared to 6% of the least competitive group. The competitive group was also much more likely to maintain a regular, structured programme of running (52%) than the least competitive (19%). All of this points to competitive runners’ particularly high investment of

time in running, and to their increased adherence to lifestyles that support performing well in the sport.

Bourdieu (2010: 278) writes that ‘the pursuit of distinction attaches [particular importance] to all those activities which... demand pure and pointless expenditure... of the rarest and most precious thing of all... namely, time.’ There is, of course, a paradox in this statement, in that the expenditure of time cannot be pointless if it is implicated in the attainment of distinction, but this remains an important point in relation to training for competitive running, because of the way running can colonise large tracts of time that could be spent on other practices (see Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). Training appears to have no obvious socioeconomic benefit for most runners, and takes up time that could be spent on many other more ‘productive’ or necessary tasks. Indeed, most participants appear to gain few if any obvious rewards from participation from the perspective of those outside the sporting field<sup>33</sup>. Participating in serious running training can thus be understood as something of a luxury. It requires (at least temporary) freedom from constraints and duties around jobs, childcare, housework and other necessities; in other words, it requires the ability to exert control over one’s own time. Below, I will explore some of the areas in which this control was exerted by my interview respondents and will discuss the sources and nature of the power on which this capacity to control is based.

### **7.3.2 Living to run**

Making space for training and maximising performance impacted on a wide range of respondents’ daily habits and routines, from what and when they ate to when they went to bed. But it also influenced big decisions such as which job they took, or where they chose to live. All these choices have potential impacts not only on their own lives, but also on those of their families and friends, as I will describe below.

Robert provides an excellent example of a highly committed runner who organises his life around his ‘need’ to train. Having recently finished university,

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<sup>33</sup> Health, fitness and weight loss being perfectly achievable through running without engaging in competition.



he chose to become a teacher at least in part because it offered him the opportunity to continue his successful running career:

Prior to... this placement they did send out a thing saying do you have dependents? Do you have a car? [etc.]... and at the very end there was an 'other' section. And I wrote in that section "Would preferably like a school within a ten miles radius of the centre of [where he lives], so that I can run-commute". And then in brackets I put, something like "in fact very much preferable" [laughs]... I think choosing the teaching profession has been part of that [i.e. wanting to continue running competitively]... I think I will... actually really enjoy the job, but an additional factor to that has been, actually I'm going to have, you know, substantially longer holidays, I know I'll have to work but I'll have... flexible time in which I can do that work in the school holidays and the half-terms, and that I will be able to incorporate a reasonable amount of running into that.

*(Robert, 23 year old male student teacher)*

Bradley, a 39 year old specialist engineer described a similar thought process, which influenced both his choice of job and where he had bought his house.

I actually wouldn't take a job in the centre of a big city at all under any circumstances, because I don't enjoy running in a city. So yeah, it would it affect, very much, that kind of choice... When I bought a place I did look at a map and see where's runnable from work, you know, that made a sort of radius around work OK, so I wanna look for a house in one of those villages [laughs] around there.

*(Bradley, 39 year old male engineer)*

For Colin, a 53 year old Ironman competitor, strict discipline was kept over his daily routines, even when on holiday with his family:

I'll get up when it's light, so maybe six o'clock in the morning, and I'll run around the village for two hours, so there's a loop that's 8km long, and I'll do it three times... and so I'm usually back at the chalet by eight o'clock. I'll collect some bread and some croissants and I'll go up, everybody else is getting out of bed, they'll have their breakfast and then we'll all go

skiing for the day, then about four o'clock in the afternoon, we'll go back in the chalet, I will then get my kit I'll then go swimming for an hour, then I'll come back, I'll have dinner with everybody and I'm in bed by nine o'clock. So it's by having the focus - time management is really important, to fit everything in.

*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

Family members and friends need to be 'conditioned' so that they fall into line with Colin's relentless training schedule. He acknowledges this can be difficult for some people, but his scheduling is uncompromising:

Some people are horrified. In fact when we go round to friends' houses for dinner now they know that 11 o'clock I'm gonna be - they'll always have dinner at 7 o'clock when we're going around. If they have other people round they'll say, right we won't eat until 8:30. But they know we're coming round, they know 11 o'clock I'll be out the door. They're all conditioned to know my habits.

*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

The runners quoted above all work full-time and two of them have dependent children, yet they are still able to create space for large volumes of training in their daily schedules by exercising autonomy in decision making about how they live their lives. For Bradley, and especially Colin, this can be understood in part in the light of their high-status jobs, in which they are able to exercise control around how they use their time and the time of others. And indeed, possession of the power to organise others and to dictate a schedule may be an important factor in generating the relationship between running and the higher - senior managerial and professional - ranks of the middle-class described earlier. This suggests that the fact that a greater proportion of men occupy high status jobs than women may be a reason for lower levels of competitive engagement amongst women (because competitive engagement is associated with running more regularly). Indeed, taking just those runners without children (parenthood has its own striking gender effects, discussed below) women in high occupational categories in the BRS (NS-SEC 1-2) had a mean combined competitive motivation

score (out of 4) of 1.8 compared to 2.1 for similar men, whereas amongst lower occupational categories (NS-SEC 4-8) there was a somewhat larger gender difference with scores of 1.6 and 2.1 for women and men respectively. This appears to suggest that if there were more women working in high status jobs the gender differences in competitive involvement for the sample as a whole would be somewhat smaller than they are.

Amongst the seriously competitive women I interviewed, only Jacqui ran as much as Colin, Robert or Bradley. However, as a university student with a flexible schedule and no family responsibilities her circumstances were also exceptional in my interview sample. They allowed her to pack in an extraordinary training volume of close to two hundred kilometres per week, including up to four runs every day:

When I was at uni I'd run in and run back, which got me sort of yeah, ten miles or so and then probably do a run at lunch time, maybe a little jog in the evening, so mostly - I mean the run commuting really provides you know a good foundation for the mileage, and then yeah, from there whenever I could fit in a 5k...

*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

Jacqui represents an extreme in terms of the volume of running she fits in, but illustrates how a lack of working or family responsibilities can provide the freedom to commit large amounts of time and energy to competitive running. Indeed, in the BRS data the runners with the highest levels of competitiveness were, on average, 5 years younger than the least competitive, perhaps suggesting that lower levels of work and caring responsibilities amongst the young help to enable their participation in competitive running. It may also shed light on the reasons behind another pattern in the data, namely that students report a much higher level of competitive motivation than those who are in work – who would seem to have the least time autonomy of the groups shown in table 7. Retired people, who theoretically have more time to dedicate to running than those of working age, may have their levels of competitive involvement pegged back by their inability to build large volumes of athletic capital (compared to younger runners) due to physiological ageing. Some also appear to have their

time for running limited by caring responsibilities for other adults (for example, partners or parents), with 10% of retirees reporting this as a factor reducing their involvement in running compared to just 4% non-retirees.

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Percentage describing motivations to both get fast times and do well in races as very important</b>
Employee	16%
Self-employed	17%
Retired	17%
Student	26%

*Table 7: Proportion of runners of different employment statuses expressing high competitive motivation.*

Of the three women interviewees with a very high competitive motivation other than Jacqui, one did not work and had no children, another had no children and worked as a journalist on a running magazine, so had to run a lot for her work, and only one, Emma, both worked (albeit part-time) and had children (one of whom was below school age). She was able to maintain a reasonably regular training regime because of her limited hours at work and because her husband (who also ran, though less regularly) and parents (who lived nearby) supported her running career, looking after the children when she wanted to run:

I'd try and somehow get childcare to do a bit of training during the week, but the long runs, obviously the important runs on the weekend, we'd [Emma and her husband] end up tag teaming it. Either I'd do it Saturday, he'd do Sunday and we'd try and do a couple of runs somehow... I was... starting to go to my parents' with the children, so then I would go, run from my parents, and they would entertain my children... And I think having, having parents that support you is a good - is an important thing. I think that has helped me, and my husband, my husband supported me a hundred percent.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

Because Emma came to serious running relatively late it is possible that her family's commitment to help is explicable in terms of the fairly short timeframe in which she could hope to realise her considerable athletic potential. Her definite plans only extended to having one fully committed athletics season to see how far she could go. This was not expected to be a permanent or long-term arrangement:

And forty being next month kind of motivates me into doing something, you know, come on, I can do it now, and this is the time of my life, I've got to do it now or not. So that's kind of my looking at this kind of next season to just push myself and see how I get on.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

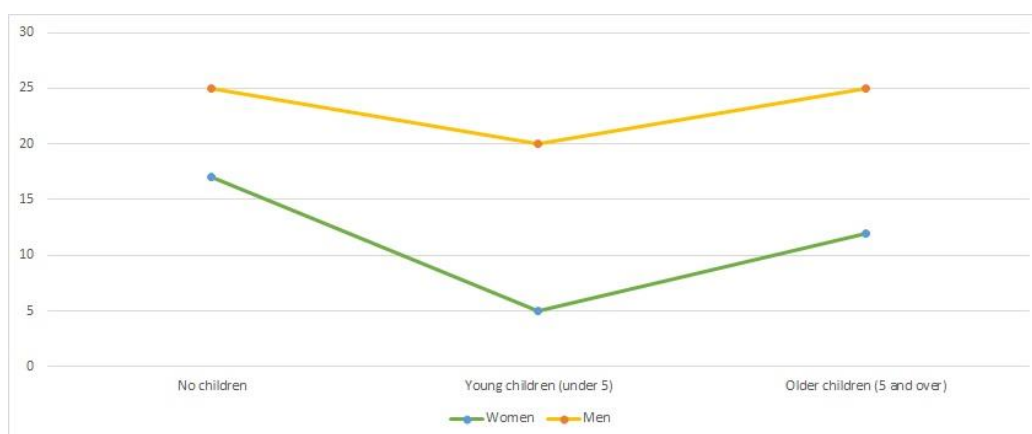
### **7.3.3 Running and family life**

As described above, apart from Emma, none of the strongly competitively oriented women runners I interviewed had children. Amongst their male counterparts however, a number were parents. This reflects in microcosm the picture given by the BRS data, which shows that only 16% of women with children under five rate themselves as having a strong competitive motivation<sup>34</sup> compared to 25% of women without children, whilst amongst men the equivalent figures are much closer at 40% and 36% respectively. This inequality may be linked to the unequal distribution of housework and childcare labour between men and women after childbirth (see Schober, 2013; Craig and Jenkins, 2016), which appears to impact women's involvement in running more than men. This seems to be reflected in the BRS data displayed in figure 21, which shows a much smaller drop-off in participation for men who have young children compared to those without than for women. Note also that men's participation rates with older children are the same as for non-parents, whereas women's remain five percentage points lower. As well as the distribution of labour, another factor here may be differences in social attitudes towards male and female parents who participate in time consuming sporting leisure. Serious leisure and selfishness have been described as 'natural partners' (Elkington and

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<sup>34</sup> Scoring at least 3 points out of 4 for combined motivations to do well in races and run fast times.

Stebbins, 2014: 22), but how this selfishness (suggested by the large amounts of time invested in self-directed activities) is interpreted appears to vary depending on the gender and parental status of the participant. Studies have shown that women with children who pursue serious sport can be positioned as ‘abandoning their children’ and as ‘errant, unthinking mother[s]’ (Palmer, 2004: 66; also see Laurendeau, 2008), whilst the same expectations are not normally applied to fathers, although as Robinson (2008) describes, some men with family commitments do recognise a degree of self-centredness in the way they pursue their sport, and modify their commitments accordingly. The pressures on fathers that she describes appear, however, to be reflexive or come from family members rather than from the more general social disapproval described by Palmer (2004) and others.



*Figure 21: Percentage of men and women running more than five times a week depending on parental status.*

An example of how becoming a mother can present a barrier to building the volumes of athletic capital required for serious competition is provided by Jennifer, a 37 year old part-time teacher. Before having her children, she was a keen racer, participating in ‘countless’ events and training regularly. After the birth of her children, and despite moving to part-time work she has had to be content with occasional jogs to try to lose the weight she had put on during pregnancy:

I got back into running quite quickly after I had [her first son], and I got a buggy and, you know, I would quite often run for his entire two hour lunchtime sleep. That wouldn't be unusual. And then - and actually I think

my running started to taper off when I decided that he needed to sleep in a cot. And... I just can't get up early enough so that the children aren't going to be awake, and after eight o'clock? [laughs] My batteries go flat, and I just, the motivation is not there to go out for a run, and also it's dark now. So it is more difficult... Once [her older son] was a bit more independent and I got back into it, but not at anywhere near as much as I was doing before. I used to be forty - between forty and fifty kilometres a week, and then it was down to about twenty if I was lucky to get out that much, because often it's about finding little pockets of time and then not being so exhausted that you want to go for a run. And then after [her younger son was born] it's just become much more difficult to find the time to do it. And now, the three days I can guarantee that I can run are the three days I'm at work, because I'm in charge of my time.

*(Jennifer, 37 years old female part-time teacher)*

In contrast to Jennifer's experiences of trying to combine parenthood and running, Bradley – who had two similar aged children - was able to continue running as much as he had before becoming a father, albeit with some modifications to the organisation of his day:

What I have done since I've had kids is I've stopped taking evenings and going to the athletics club to train. I did used to go to [the club] twice a week; since I've had kids I've hardly been at all. I still do the sessions I would have done, but I do them on my own and I fit them in around my commute to work. That's the way I structure that.

*(Bradley, 39 year old male engineer)*

These illustrations of the gendered experiences of changes to running practice after the birth of children fit with other research that shows that not only do mothers have access to significantly less leisure time than fathers (see Craig and Mullan, 2013, for data across a range of national contexts), but women in general also appear to have lower levels of negotiating power when it comes to organising how housework is split between partners within the home. This may be connected to their lower incomes (see Bittman et al. 2003), but gender also appears to structure this imbalance independently (see Tichenor, 2005). We can

understand this in Bourdieusian terms by conceptualising the family as a social field, a structured space in which power to determine the 'rules of the game' resides with those agents most endowed with specific forms of capital. As Bourdieu (2001) describes, this tends to result in the reproduction of an arbitrary, historically-contingent division of labour that places the burden of mundane and repetitive tasks on women, with 'spectacular' tasks or 'exploits' as Veblen (2007) describes them, reserved for men. Atkinson (2016) suggests that imbalances in economic and physical capital play roles structuring family fields in this way, but gender capital (see Huppatz, 2012) is of central importance too. Bourdieu (2001) describes how pervasive symbolic violence exercised through everyday practices reproduces the social advantages conferred on men over women. 'Masculine domination', objectified in society's structures and mirrored in everyone's habitus, confers decision-making power on male parents by virtue of their biological sex, naturalising the patriarchal model of the family. For many people with family and work commitments, the power to exert control over family life is vital to being able to make space for the large volumes of training competitive running demands. It seems likely that this contributes to the lower levels of women participating in competitive running, with many simply unable to exercise enough control over their time to commit to the volumes of training required to build sufficient levels of athletic capital.

The seriously competitive runners with partners or families that I interviewed acknowledged (at least tacitly) that the time they spent on their sport had externalised costs, but there was little evidence of reflection as to whether or how the prices paid by loved ones for them to pursue what is essentially a hobby could be justified. This could be understood as a reflection of their submission to the *illusio* of the field – the intrinsic worthiness of the sport was taken for granted and time spent pursuing it didn't need to be justified. Or it could be a function of their naturalised, dominant position within the field of the family – their right to use their time how they pleased was taken for granted. One of the few expressions of concern over how the demands of the sporting field might be incompatible with the emotional needs of a family member was from Emma, who described how her husband worried that she was getting unhealthily thin:



In regards to weight and physique I guess sometimes I look at myself and think I'm a bit too thin and my husband worries about me being a bit too thin, but it's just getting that balance of trying to eat enough... So it is just making sure that I eat enough really, for what I do.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

As Emma's comment illustrates, rigid or exacting training regimes can lead not only to family members having to 'pick up the slack' in terms of household duties or subordinating their lifestyle to that of the runner, but also to emotional strain too. In Emma's case though, she was not pursuing the sport against or irrespective of her family's wishes, but *because* they had encouraged and supported her to see how far she could go. Rather than a result of Emma's use of familial authority, her husband's and parents' efforts to facilitate her running can be better understood as an expression of what Atkinson (2016) calls 'affective recognition', or in other words, love. Atkinson explains that love can act as a form of symbolic capital within the family field, its 'relative possession grants utter fulfilment and contentment... "I'll do anything for you"' (Atkinson, 2016: 59). This 'is not to reduce [love] to... instrumental principles', Atkinson continues, but to acknowledge that 'to be loved is one of the most basic yet arbitrary forms of power over others'. So, in discussions of autonomy and power within the family field it is important to remember that affection plays a role too, although it should not be overlooked that ultimately this rests on obtaining permission, rather than asserting a right. This is illustrated through the words of Gwen, another late flourishing and highly successful female runner:

I... went to work for [an international organisation] for two years, but that was masses of traveling, most of my team were in Singapore, Geneva or New York, so I spent all my time sitting in airports or being totally jet-lagged, and my husband just said... 'why are you bothering going to work, you know, we don't need two incomes' and I said, 'yeah, fine I'll stay at home, I don't mind'. So that's what I've done ever since, I sort of do housework and pursue whatever interests happen to present themselves... when I gave up work in 2009 it's no coincidence that's also when I started road running quite seriously again, because I suddenly had

the time to go out and do twenty mile runs, which I never would have managed when I was working.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

Like Emma, who was granted time to train by a supportive husband and parents, Gwen was only able to train competitively after her husband offered her the opportunity to relinquish other responsibilities. The experiences of these women stand in contrast to the comparably competitive men I spoke to, who were able to make space for running by asserting authority over the lives of others. So, whilst these women's experiences could be read as subversions of gender norms that restrict women's involvement in competitive sport – particularly once they have a family - they can equally be seen as assertions of a benign, paternalistic power. In Gwen's case in particular, the 'price' of her liberty was a significant loss of economic capital, and a consequent increase in reliance on her husband as the family 'breadwinner'. In this, her position has an uncomfortable resonance with Bale's (2004) notion of the 'athlete as pet', with her husband playing the role of beneficent master.

#### **7.3.4 Section conclusion**

Throughout this section we have seen how a competitive orientation to running and a high degree of internalisation of the sporting field's *illusio* can place significant demands on runners' time, lifestyle, and their involvement in other fields. For runners with relatively few competing responsibilities or priorities it is naturally much easier to find sufficient time to train than for those engaged in numerous other demanding fields. However, people in professional or managerial jobs in which they control other people's time and have the opportunity to exercise autonomy over their own also appear to have greater opportunities to engage in time consuming training regimes. We have seen that having a dependent family can be particularly difficult to juggle with engagement in competitive running, but this barrier appears much more significant for women, who may be more reliant on their partners' goodwill than men in obtaining the time necessary to train. These findings point to the conclusion that the lower rates of participation in competitive running for women and those in lower status occupations can be in part understood in terms of their being

unable to exercise sufficient control over their own time and the time of others to engage in the training required.

Inequalities of opportunity are not always recognised by those who are able to participate in serious leisure. Discussing marathon swimmers, Throsby (2016: 28) explains that ‘the privileged status that attaches to being able to “walk the walk” relies upon narratives of deserving rather than happenstance; success here is earned, not given’. She quotes a long-distance swimmer as saying ‘it’s all about whether you’re prepared to put in the work’ to succeed. No talk of opportunities, barriers or facilitators here. Similarly, running provides a site at which existing inequalities can be reproduced and naturalised. Those with the power and resources to commit large amounts of surplus time to ‘pointless’ athletic labour – most notably upper-middle-class<sup>35</sup> men – are able to reproduce their privileged social status through domination of the sport, performing the virtues of self-determination and work ethic that help justify their social status along the way.

## **7.4 The Meaning of Success**

### **7.4.1 Running’s symbolic power**

In *Distinction* Bourdieu (2010: 278) states that ‘what is at stake [in our lifestyle and consumption choices] is indeed “personality”, i.e. the quality of the person, which is affirmed in the capacity to appropriate an object of quality’. The capacity to appropriate symbols of athletic success through racing thus bespeaks a person’s ‘qualities’ and ‘personality’ – it says something important about who they are and thus where they fit into wider social space. The potency of this symbolism is enhanced because, as we have seen, building the capital required to access status within the field is a time consuming process and, as Bourdieu argues, ‘capacities which requiring a long investment of time... appear as the surest indications of the quality of the person’ (ibid). But what are the qualities appropriated through the performance of competitive running? And what does this mean in terms of the sport’s appeal to different social groups and its role in

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<sup>35</sup> Here defined as professionals and senior managers, as per table 2.

reproducing social inequalities? In this section I will focus on one quality in particular, namely 'mental toughness'.

#### **7.4.2 What is mental toughness?**

A key theme picked up on by competitive runners in their interviews was the perceived importance of certain psychological qualities for converting physical capital built through training into a great performance on race day. Essentially this revolves around the idea that for a runner to race at their best they need to deploy their physical capital in the most efficient and complete way possible, and that this involves making use of a capacity to maintain commitment and focus under extreme physiological pressure. Sportspeople often describe this as the capacity to 'dig deep' or to 'give 110%'. Gwen illustrates this idea below:

[You need] the ability to hold it all together in race conditions when you're on the brink of oxygen starvation to the brain, when you can only just think straight, and still be able to make those decisions and... interpret the navigation and the terrain accurately at full speed, when you know that your rivals are going to be within 20 or 30 seconds of you.  
*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

For Gwen this skill is vital to competitive running. It corresponds closely to what Lyng (1990) describes as 'mental toughness', a characteristic widely perceived as being the key to succeeding in running as well as many other forms of demanding and dangerous sports. Colin provides his own interpretation of this quality below:

It's that sort of notion, that you can override your Central Governor, and push yourself to its limits really... And some people just think you can't do that. Some people will fold. You know, they will get to 18 miles in a marathon and they'll walk, because they haven't got the mental fortitude and application to get through that moment... You know, I can force myself through a marathon, and it's not a big deal.  
*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

Here Colin describes an extraordinary degree of self-mastery, to the extent that through willpower he believes he can overcome his body's fail-safe mechanism, the Central Governor, a hypothetical cognitive module for preventing dangerous over-exertion (see Noakes, 2003). For him, this ability to maintain control under physical stress, which he calls 'mental fortitude', is the necessary foundation on which running success can be built:

I think you have to have the raw materials... I've coached... four people to a high level of success in triathlon... And I've taught them some techniques to get through the difficult moments, but they still have to have the building blocks to layer that on such that they can make use of those techniques. [One coachee] I would describe athletically as a much more natural athlete than me... [but] he's not able to focus in the way that I can to get him through those kind of distances [i.e. ironman races].  
*(Colin, 52 year old male businessman)*

Emma, another elite runner, saw her ability to push herself to her limits through a different lens, although she also saw it as something 'natural' to her that not everyone else shared. She linked her will to push herself to an overwhelming desire to beat her opponents as well as her own best performances:

I don't understand why people aren't competitive because I think I'm naturally very competitive... I'm quite competitive with myself and I think I do want to do better. And sometimes I just push myself, you know I guess I'm more punishing myself sometimes... And I think I've been lucky enough to do well, and I just want to almost keep that up.  
*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

Emma's reference to 'punishing' herself alludes to the idea of mental toughness as closely related to the ability to handle pain. And indeed, the valorisation of stoicism and the ability to handle pain suggested by the interviewees quoted above is reflected in wider discourse around competitive running, as exemplified in this passage from an article in *Runner's World* (Barker, 2009):

'As all experienced runners know, it's the only question in distance running - the very heart of competition. Who can best endure the self-imposed, total mind/body ache that goes away if you ease back a little bit? The one who does not give in, the one who endures, even embraces the pain, finishes first.'

So, doing serious competitive running is understood as involving pushing oneself as hard as possible, not 'giving in' to and 'embracing' pain. As such, the capacity to endure physical suffering is an important part of the successful competitive runner's habitus in a similar way to that described in the context of professional ballet dancers by Turner and Wainwright (2003). Unlike the dancers, however, runners encounter pain as a necessary part of *every* competitive performance (and many training sessions) not only something to be endured stoically during times of injury. As such, displaying mental toughness in the face of pain can be understood as part of the normative performance of competitive running.

### **7.4.3 Macho women?**

As well as being part of the normative performance of competitive running, displays of stoicism, emotional toughness and mind-over-body self-control, are also strongly linked to the performance of traditional male gender identities (see Kimmel, 1996; Messner, 1992). As Lois (2005: 149) describes in her study of mountain rescue workers, in contrast to the women she interviewed, the 'men tended to talk about their ability to suppress emotions as though it was a natural or essential part of who they were'. In the context of sport, Throsby (2016: 120) argues that 'courageous or determined performance is aligned with masculinity, as in demands to "man up" or "grow a pair"'. Conversely, 'weakness is intractably associated with the feminine through exhortations to "stop crying like a girl" or "stop being such a woman."' This, as Throsby argues, leaves women with no obvious language through which to characterise the toughness they display through running outside the 'gendered hierarchy of feminine weakness and masculine capability' (ibid). This seems to be reflected in Kerry's description of her own determined character as 'macho':

I think there was a sense of like, [believing I was] hard-core as well. And because I was a girl, I wanted to prove that girls could do that kind of thing as well as boys, and that we could stay the distance as well. There was a bit of macho-ness going on there.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*

The implication that it is masculine not to give in, and feminine to quit when the going gets tough is made more explicit in her later comment:

[Women are] allowed to just give up. And we're allowed to start laughing or something if it's, you know - we get embarrassed about being competitive.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*

The performance of mental toughness, which is central to competitive running, thus reinforces normative masculine gender identities; giving up or failing to give one's all, on the other hand, fits comfortably with those of normative femininity.

The association between masculinity and displaying toughness through running also manifests in the sport's institutional and commercial culture. Challenging events are given names such as Ironman, Man versus Mountain, Man versus Coast and Man Tests (despite being open to both men and women), appearing to confirm that success in the sport (or perhaps even the right to participate at all) is contingent on the possession of masculine traits – or even on simply being a man. As such, women who defy these expectations by beating men 'at their own game' can cause men a degree of insecurity as the rigid categories of the 'heterosexual matrix' are belied and their own athletic and gender identity is placed on shakier footing. Emma illustrates her experience of this below:

Men don't really like being overtaken by women [laughs]... sometimes it irritates people because I push myself and... there are certain men who would probably rather, I don't know, not be beaten by me... I think I might have annoyed people, overtaking them, in the past. It's just generally the gender thing, I guess people don't expect to be overtaken by a woman. You know a bloke, macho, you know there's two of them, you can keep going, that's fine with banter, but I think when it gets -

when it's a girl it's like 'oh' [disappointed], I think there's that kind of thing a little bit.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

The kind of discomfort Emma believed men felt in the face of her displays of mental toughness and athleticism can be understood as deriving from an inversion of sport's traditional gender hierarchy, of which men are normally the beneficiaries. Part of this is the breakdown of the tenacious notion of the feminine being defined by the (uncivilized) body, and the masculine by the rational, controlling mind. Rather than these women's bodies conforming to the gendered expectation of being the undisciplined and frail seat of emotions and intuitions that have empire over their minds, they instead perform masculine self-efficacy and determination, with a focused mind asserting control over a highly disciplined sporting body of the kind described by Brohm (1987: 55) as a mechanised 'automaton, governed by the principle of maximising output'.

But as we have seen, highly competitive women runners are a relatively small minority. Normative femininity simply does not fit well with displays of mental toughness and the desire to beat opponents. As such, many women may be put off participating in forms of running that can be understood as a performance of 'masculine' toughness, whilst this may add to its appeal for men. This might help to make sense of the forms of racing women tend to participate in according to the BRS data, which are more likely to be over shorter distances and less gruelling terrain than those popular with men (see figure 12, page 166).

Additionally, those like the female athletes discussed above, whose early social experiences appear to have equipped them with a 'feel for the game' of competitive running, can still find obstacles and disincentives to participation. We have seen these can take the form of subtle symbolic violence through being excluded from the comradely but competitive badinage enjoyed by male runners, or of being subject to negative or grudging reactions from defeated male opponents. It should be noted though, that not all of the elite women runners I spoke to recognised this problem (see Jacqui's comments earlier about the irrelevance of gender in running), and it may vary significantly between different social contexts.



#### 7.4.4 Mental toughness and class

As well as gender, class also appears to be implicated in the appeal of forms of running that are especially demanding of mental toughness. We saw in figures 3 and 4 (pages 137 and 138) and table 2 (page 144) that participation in running *per se* is strongly associated with employment in middle-class occupations. But as the BRS data in figure 22 shows, there is significant variation within running, in terms of the economic and cultural assets of participants in different forms of the sport. The highest total volumes of economic and cultural capital amongst runners are associated most strongly with what could be interpreted as the most gruelling events – ultra distance, fell-running and triathlon<sup>36</sup>. Also note the almost perfect correspondence between total volume of capital and race distance: Shorter distances attract runners with lower total capital volume, and longer races attract those with higher levels of overall capital. This holds true for both genders examined independently as well as combined, as in the figure.

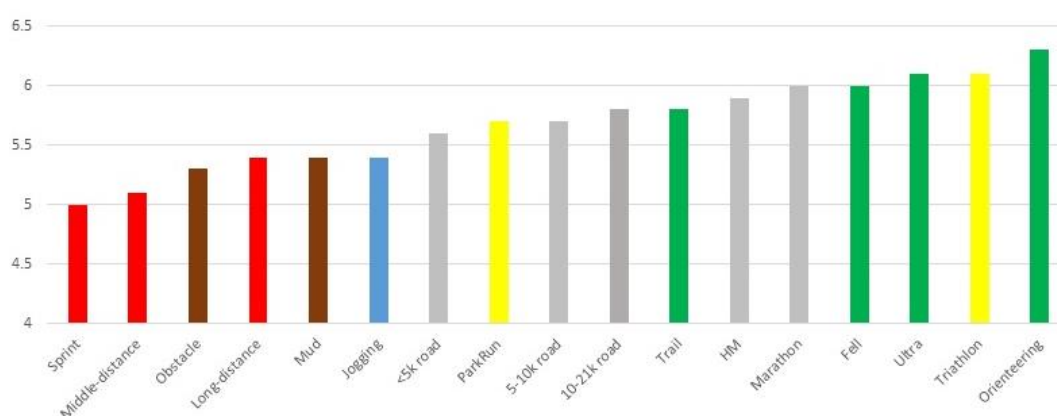


Figure 22: Forms by combined economic and cultural capital rank.

These figures can be understood partly in the light of the close fit between the middle-class habitus, with its tastes for self-discipline, self-determination and stoicism (see Bourdieu, 2010; Lyng and Matthews, 2007; Le Bretton, 2000) and the ‘mental toughness’ of the long-distance runner’s habitus. Ehrenreich (1989), Fletcher (2008) and others suggest that the professional middle-class in particular (which, as we have seen, makes up a disproportionately large part of the running population, see table 2 on page 144), whose class position is based

<sup>36</sup> Orienteering was also more popular with those holding high volumes of capital, but this may be for other reasons discussed in the next chapter.

on long years of training through education, especially values the qualities of hard work, focus and discipline that long distance running enables participants to perform. But managerial roles today are also normally accessed through extended education and patient progress up the career ladder. Colin, who had worked his way up to leadership roles in several businesses, was explicit about the relationship between what he perceived as the demands of running and the responsibilities and stresses of white-collar occupations:

You know, I can force myself through a marathon, and it's not a big deal. Some people can't force themselves through 10k. They'll feel exhausted over to 10k and absolutely mentally shattered. Well, I guess the kind of training I do conditions me to get through that. And... at work there are those moments in anybody's professional career when they think, you know the roof's falling in and I don't think I can hack any more of this, and I guess it's that resilience to sort of stand in all of that and sort of go, "no, we'll get through this and let's just crack on, and I'll put up with all of this and I'll get through it." And so that's the sort of characteristic of "this is not going to beat me and I will get through it somehow" and I guess I'm more successful at that than some other people are.

Long-distance running then, a sport that appeals to distinctively middle-class tastes, offers a way of actualising the class habitus and thus of positioning runners within this privileged social group - or perhaps even as exemplars of some of its most important values. In a small way, this helps to justify these privileged individuals taking up the high-status occupations that are the basis of their cultural and economic power.

#### **7.4.5 Section conclusion**

Over the course of this section we have seen how committed competitive running is understood by practitioners as, in part, a performance of mental toughness. In this regard serious running can be interpreted as a realisation of the traditional masculine habitus, and particularly that of middle-class masculinity, with its idealisation of control, stoicism and emotional restraint. Indeed, a middle-class male background appears to adapt this group particularly

well to the environment, demands and ethos of the sport, helping to explain its predominance in terms of participation rates, as shown in the BRS and APS data.

Women who display mental toughness through competitive running have little choice but to describe their actions in masculinised terms, highlighting the transgression of gender norms this represents. Whilst running generally paints itself as a sport offering equal opportunities to men and women, the masculinisation of toughness is apparent in the nomenclature of some events, with manliness used as a synonym for the ability to cope with the most difficult challenges. It is likely that this 'macho' ethos puts off some women competitors, as reflected in lower female participation rates in more extreme or gruelling forms of race. We have seen evidence that some women who are not put off participating can still feel some hostility for having gate-crashed this 'man's world', perhaps particularly those who are successful enough to disrupt the male-dominated status hierarchy of the sport.

### **7.5 Overall summary and conclusions**

Competitive racing is an important and popular way of doing running. To be more accurate it is the only truly sporting (i.e. competitive) form, with other non-competitive ways of doing running perhaps more accurately described as physical recreations or fitness activities. Whilst there is a spectrum of competitive runners, from elite athletes to fitness joggers who use occasional races as a motivation to run regularly, there is a distinctive identity amongst those who see themselves as seriously committed to the competitive field. Put simply these are those who see themselves as 'runners' or 'athletes' and not 'joggers'. Indeed, many competitive runners use the latter term quite pejoratively and can react defensively if asked if they have 'been out for a jog' rather than 'been training' or 'out for a run'. 'Runners' and 'athletes' see themselves as serious competitors engaged in a demanding and distinctive sport in the search of valuable sporting symbolic capital. They are immersed in the *doxa* of the field and consumed by its *illusio*.

As we have seen, the competitive field attracts a socially distinctive group of participants. The BRS survey shows that men dominate in terms of competitive

motivation, and even amongst those runners who participate in running primarily to lose weight, men are much more likely than women to also harbour competitive motives. Competitive runners also tend to be significantly younger than the mean, and, common to running more generally, they are drawn disproportionately from the middle-class.

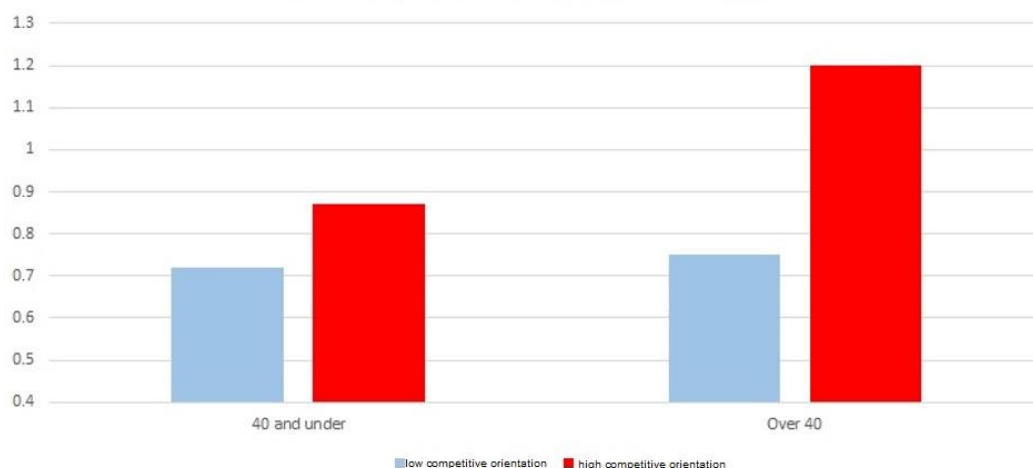
Unlike health and fitness-focused running, which focuses primarily on motivations extrinsic to running itself such as losing weight, keeping healthy or de-stressing, the competitive runner's focus is on direct competition for finite rewards and positions of status within the field. This not only attracts those who have internalised a competitive orientation to sport, but also encourages an 'arms race' in terms of training volumes, as runners seek to get ahead of their rivals. As we have seen, this can lead to a huge demand on runners' time, and favours those with relatively few responsibilities (e.g. the young and students), and those who have the resources or authority to delegate responsibilities to others. Often this means men (in the context of families) and those established in middle-class occupations, which allow for a degree of self-determination and control of working patterns. We have also seen that a key feature and meaning of competitive running is around performing mental toughness, a prominent aspect in many descriptions of hegemonic masculinity and linked to the values of rationality, stoicism and asceticism particularly associated with the professional middle-class, and valorised by the class more widely.

The clash between the dispositions towards competition and mental toughness realised through competitive running and normative femininity is striking, and the evidence discussed above suggests that without significant opportunities to internalise these values through sport when young, many women are simply not attracted to participate. Those who do engage describe differing strategies and experiences in relation to gender. Gwen and Kerry reported joining in with 'macho' banter, with the latter wanting to prove herself as being equal to the men in terms of her abilities; Jacqui rejected the notion that gender was an issue or even had any meaning within the sport, claiming only to see runners, not men and women; and Emma described using the 'microaggressions' (see Kaskan and Ho, 2016) she faced when beating male competitors as:

motivation... it doesn't worry me... I do laugh a little bit if people get annoyed... And if I can beat a bloke it's you know, it's probably even better because that means that I'm going at a good pace.

*(Emma, 39 year old female part-time nurse)*

In terms of the low participation rates of older runners, physiological ageing plays an important role in undermining success at generating symbolic capital in the field (see Lovett, 2009), and factors around increasing responsibilities (such as the likelihood of having children or other caring responsibilities) appear to play a role in impeding involvement after young adulthood too. But paradoxically, this drop off in competitive involvement with age may also create opportunities for some older runners. Those who are still able to compete are all the more distinctive because other members of their age-group no longer do. This allows a minority to use competitive running as a means of resisting the 'myth of decline' (see Tulle, 2008) with age, and to retain athletic capital, with its culturally valuable associations with youthfulness. This is reflected in figure 23, which shows that compared to the least competitive runners, serious competitors are markedly more motivated by the desire to 'look or feel young', and that this is *especially* true amongst those aged over 40.



*Figure 23: Mean level of reported motivation 'to look or feel young' in runners from older and younger age groups and highest and lowest competitive motivations.*

Most older people though, along with women and those of working-class backgrounds, remain less interested or less able to participate in the sport than

the young(ish) middle-class men who make up the lion's share of competitive running's participation base. Most of the women and older people who do participate in running tend to do so in ways that centre on health, weight loss and well-being, with those who do race often doing so primarily to provide motivation to maintain a regular running regime. These inequalities reflect wider issues around girls' and working-class children's relative lack of engagement in sport at school age, and even broader issues around the nature of normative femininity in modern Britain. However, there are opportunities for institutions and event organisers in the competitive field to create a more inclusive culture within the sport, especially at its more 'extreme' (i.e. 'macho', masculinised) end, ranging from more careful use of language in naming events to rethinking some race routes or staffing to ensure slower runners, who are currently disproportionately female and/or older, are not excluded or marginalised. More difficult to achieve, but more transformative, might be a shift in the culture of the field to allow for alternative but equally legitimate formulations of mental toughness. Lois (2005) describes how female mountain rescue workers cope with dangerous and stressful experiences by acknowledging, monitoring and managing their feelings. Their male counterparts, on the other hand, described 'suppressing' their emotions. Because feminine gender norms 'encourage women to be highly in touch with their emotions... for many women the self is found *in* emotions and feelings' (Lois, 2005: 150). As such the masculine suppression strategy – the stoical form of mental toughness also displayed in running - is, for women, akin to suppression of the self. Perhaps if feminine strategies for managing pain and suffering that acknowledge rather than suppress the self could be accepted as simply another way of 'doing' mental resilience in competitive running, and were not disparaged as 'weak' or 'negative thinking', more women might feel inclined to participate in the sport.

## Chapter 8: Findings IV

# Running Places

### 8.1 The importance of place

Over the last two chapters I have explored diversity in running primarily in terms of motivational orientation, in particular the distinctive ‘competitive’ and ‘health and fitness’ clusters. Now though, I want to shift perspective to take account of another important structuring factor that emerges from the empirical data: Variations in practice, meaning and participation that are linked to the environments in which running is practised. Bourdieu (2010) argued in *Distinction* that the environments in which recreations take place play an important role in defining their positions in the social ‘space of lifestyles’: Each environment’s unique combination of physical and cultural characteristics acts to generate the differentials in appeal and access that give each form its unique social profile. And compared to most other sports, environment is an especially pertinent factor in running because of the close relationship between particular environments and particular forms of the sport. Variants of running like track athletics, fell-running, road running and obstacle course racing are *defined* by the environments in which they take place. What is more, different running environments are associated with distinctive institutions, histories and competitive fields. As a result, subcultures have emerged around each, heightening differences in appeal between social groups.

As we saw in figures 10 and 11 (pages 163 and 164), forms of running that take place in different environments are located in very different areas of the field of running, being heavily structured across all four MCA dimensions (engagement, competition/self-care, goal/experience preference and individual/social orientation). Data analysed in chapter five clearly showed that running forms that take place in different environments are distinctive in terms of participants’ age, gender, occupational profile and cultural and economic capital. It is worth noting that the variance between environments in terms of these variables

almost certainly underplays the true degree of social difference between these forms, because the data provides no way of distinguishing regular or habitual involvement in a given environment from occasional involvement. In other words, a habitual fell-runner who runs a road race just once a year would present the same participation profile as a habitual road runner who raced in just one fell-race. Because most runners participate in more than one environment at least occasionally this has the effect of pulling the demographics of the environmental clusters closer together than they might be if we could distinguish runners in terms of the environment they most strongly identified with.

Over the course of this chapter I will examine each of the four main running environments identified in chapter five - road, track, rural and obstacle course. I will describe their distinctive cultural and social profiles, and will identify the mechanisms through which these patterns and meanings are generated and maintained.

## **8.2 Hitting the Roads**

Both the BRS and APS datasets indicate that roads are by far the most common environment runners choose to race in. The APS data, which provides the more representative sample, suggests around 20% of runners have participated in a road race in the last 12 months, a figure more than twice that of all of the other forms put together. The BRS data indicates that only 5% of runners have not raced *or* trained/jogged on roads over the last year. Figures 12 and 16 (pages 166 and 174) show that road running events attract a participation base that is fairly representative of running as a whole, with gender, age, income and education levels close to the mean for the whole BRS sample. And on the MCA plots, road races (represented by half marathons) sit close to the middle of all four dimensions. Largely this can be understood as a reflection of the large size of this group relative to the entire BRS sample.

It has been said that running is the most accessible of sports - all you need is a pair of trainers and a front door - so with over 80% of people's front doors now opening onto urban streets according to the last census (Office for National Statistics, 2011) it makes sense that it is roads that account for most runners'



usual running environment. And indeed, ease of access was cited by a number of interviewees as the main reason for running on roads regularly, for instance:

Interviewer: And do you do you do most of your running on tarmac - on the pavements?

Jacqui: Yeah, most of it is on road.

Interviewer: Is that because you're coming - because you're running out from the house?

Jacqui: Yeah, I mean there are you know within every run there's at least a couple of sections of quite nice footpath from round here there are quite a few nice footpaths, but most I would describe myself as a road runner, mainly probably because of opportunity we have rather than preference.

*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

For those who want to fit running – whether for competitive or health and fitness motives - into a hectic work or family schedule, urban roads often afford the most efficient access, even if, as Ettema (2016) found, given the choice, many would prefer to run outside of built up areas. Ease of access also provides part of the explanation for the popularity of the urban road races that most large towns and cities host. The most famous of these, the Great North Run and London Marathon, were frequently cited as aspirational or memorable races by interviewees, illustrating how as well as being eminently accessible to those using running as a low cost body or health management tool, road running also provides relatively easy access to a field of competitive events including prestigious races that afford those who have completed them a measure of symbolic (reputational) capital amongst fellow runners.

It has been argued that accessibility can, paradoxically, reduce take-up of leisure activities by some groups. As Bourdieu (2010: 212) states, 'accessibility and all that this entails, such as undesirable contacts, tend to discredit [certain sports activities] in the eyes of the dominant class'. And not only are roads easy to access physically, they also require no special navigational knowledge (as do orienteering and fell-running), no understanding of special etiquette or rules (as

does track racing), no club membership and no specialist kit. In this light it is striking that despite its accessibility, road running remains a highly classed activity within the space of lifestyles (see figure 4, page 138), attracting many high-status adherents. We have seen in previous chapters that this can be understood in part as a result of differences in taste and resources, but another factor may be the effective *inaccessibility* of some working-class streets compared to those of the middle-class. This was alluded to by my interviewee, Tina, who described avoiding certain ‘no go’ areas – what she saw as rough or intimidating estates - because of concerns about unwanted attention or physical threat:

I've never felt scared running in London... but I suppose I probably picked - I wouldn't go through certain - certain estates or something that I knew would be worrying...[The estates to avoid are] all pedestrianised, so very cut off... so it is being cut off from anywhere... I probably wouldn't walk through them in the day for that same reason, so running through them is probably a similar thing in fact.

*(Tina, 38 year old female IT manager)*

Tina's comments about avoiding ‘certain estates’ appear to suggest navigating around particular working-class areas that she associated with a greater likelihood of encountering unwanted attention. She juxtaposes this with the safe streets close to her expensive, gentrified town house. Gimlin (2010: 276) writes that runners who have experienced abuse regularly assumed that their harassers were working-class. But do these fears and perceptions reflect a real classed variation in risk or merely middle-class prejudice? An email interview with Clive, a 42 year old man who grew up on a council estate in a city in the Midlands, suggests the latter view may be more accurate. He described how as a young, working-class man he faced harassment when out running close to home:

I can clearly remember as a young teenager always being conscious about the times I went for a run so as to avoid as many people as possible... At that time we lived on a council estate and I can recall being wolf whistled at by older male teenagers... Having the [boxing film] Rocky theme

hummed to me on a few occasions as I ran past... I can also recall being really conscious as a teenager about going for a run while the Olympics or the London Marathon was taking place as on at least two occasions I can remember a car going past and shouting out that "The Marathon's finished already mate!"... I've had a youth suddenly start running next to me as I jogged as though he was racing me and his mates all in stitches as they looked on.

*(Clive, 42 year old male student)*

This kind of harassment serves as a kind of self-inflicted symbolic violence, whereby the working-class polices itself to suppress 'middle-class practices' like running that are 'not for the likes of us'. It may not only be the existing demographic profile of running that 'others' it for working-class people; it may also transmit signals about habitus that clash with working-class values. Gimlin (2010: 278) suggests the kind of 'uncivil attention' runners can be subject to is connected in part to its perceived signification of an 'unacceptable degree of "involvement"... in the self', particularly around their health and wellbeing. As we saw in chapter six, self-oriented practices and dispositions have been strongly connected to the middle-class, and clash with the communal orientations traditionally more prevalent in the working-class.

Street harassment is a common experience for runners irrespective of gender, although the nature and experience of the abuse can be quite different for men and women (see Koplan, Rothenberg and Jones, 1995; Gimlin, 2010). For Clive, as a powerfully built rugby playing man, his experiences of harassment were uncomfortable, but not frightening. The abuse he received never felt threatening. Similar incidents can take on a very different meaning for women. Olivia, a 48 year old woman who runs in her home city during the winter because of the availability of street lighting, but feels safer out on the hills near her home in summer, describes the harassment she has received running in urban areas, and how she avoids certain places because of what she identifies as a particular threat to women:

I've been pretty lucky, I mean a lot of women I think really do get heckled, but I haven't been heckled that much. But, just teenagers tend to just take the mick out of you, but they're always - it's never aggressive it's just annoying... the kid following me was, yeah that was yeah, I didn't enjoy that... I would never run on a canal [path] on my own, because - and that's not fair because men just happily will just go off and run and I have to take that into consideration, I don't think that's fair.

*(Olivia, 48 year old female writer)*

Olivia highlights a gendered perception of risk that chimes with other comments made by women interviewees about unwanted attention from (often teenaged) male pedestrians and older male drivers. These experiences fit with the work of Logan (2013) that describes the high levels of street harassment – and fear of harassment – experienced by women. They also help explain the relatively high proportion of female runners participating in gym-based treadmill running in the BRS sample, which, like a number of other female-dominated indoor fitness activities identified in figure 1 (page 106), offers a more controlled and safe environment away from the threat of the objectifying male gaze (see Kaskan and Ho, 2016) and frightening, often sexualised harassment (see Gimlin, 2010).

The combination of perceptions of both greater female vulnerability to harassment on the streets and higher rates of this kind of abuse in some working-class areas may contribute to the underrepresentation of working-class women (compared to men from similar backgrounds) in the running population as described by the BRS data. Conversely, for those women who have access to streets where they can feel safe from unwanted attention (perhaps those living in middle-class areas), roads can provide a relatively worry-free environment for running. Several described how the familiarity of built-up areas with pavements, street lighting and other people close by generated a sense of safety and security. Katie describes why she prefers to run on the roads near her home and avoids venturing into nearby fields alone:

I've had like instances where dogs have chased me across like a field, so I tend to sort of stick to routes that I know, routes that are popular with

other runners. And I do less kind of like across country fields and across those kind of sort of places where you can be quite remote, if I'm on my own. If I'm running with a friend then I don't worry about it, but I still always take my phone.

*(Katie, 35 year old female marketing manager)*

Gwen, a 42 year old competitive orienteer contrasts her nervousness about running off-road at night with her comfort running in town:

Gwen: I really get quite freaked out going out in the forest, particularly the Forest of Dean at night on my own for training sessions, so my husband comes with me.

Interviewer: Do you have any concerns about personal safety when you're out running in town rather than you know, out in the wild?

Gwen: Not in [town], [the town's] very - it's quite a running orientated town. You see if I were to drive out of here... on a Saturday morning if I were to drive through [town] I would expect to see maybe a dozen people out running. You know, it's quite lively.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

Despite some reservations (several quite strongly voiced) about traffic, pollution and busy pavements, almost all my interviewees took part in road running at least occasionally. None though, expressed an especially strong liking for running on the streets *per se* (except in comparison with running indoors on treadmills); road running is popular largely for functional reasons – it is easy to access, can feel safe, and, as one female respondent explained, allows you to keep your trainers clean! The only exceptions to this rule were those respondents who expressed an enjoyment of running in foreign cities, where roads provided a chance for sight-seeing, and in relation to the opportunities road running affords for participating in big city races with lots of runners and spectators.

Whilst road running may be a distinctive practice in wider social space, within the microcosm of running itself, as we have seen, it represents the centre of gravity in the data, with by far the largest number of practitioners. In a sense then, road running can be regarded as a baseline against which the distinctiveness of forms

based in other environments become meaningful. Indeed, as we will see in the sections that follow, practitioners of some more specialist forms make specific efforts to avoid identification as road runners, whom they see as being of lower status within the wider sport. Some even question whether some road runners at least are practising the same sport as them at all.

### **8.3.1 Temples of speed**

If road running represents an easy point of entry into the sport, the athletics track represents the most sportingly exclusive environment in which running takes place. The MCA plots in figures 10 and 11 (page 163 and 164) show that track competitors (represented by 'sprinter' on the charts) rate themselves the most talented, report winning the most medals and are most likely to represent a club of all those in the BRS data. These plots also suggest that track racers score highly on engagement, competitiveness, goal and individualised orientations. Track competitors make up a small fraction of the running population, with the APS data suggesting that only around 2.8% of runners have participated in a race at a track in the last 12 months<sup>37</sup>. However, amongst the runners included in the BRS sample, around 35% use the track at least occasionally for training purposes, even if not for racing. Part of the reason for the very low numbers of runners involved in races at the track is that most track races take place under the auspices of clubs and their organising bodies, leaving little opportunity to participate for those not affiliated with a local team. In the BRS data, only 12% of those who claim to have participated in a track race in the last year also claim never to have trained with a team; the equivalent figure for road runners is 34%.

Figure 12 (page 166) suggests that the gender balance of track athletics in the BRS data is close to that of running as a whole. This is supported by the APS data. However, in the more detailed BRS dataset we can observe some variation within track athletics, with sprinters (those who race over short distances of up to 400m) more likely to be women than middle- and long-distance track athletes

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<sup>37</sup> APS data only includes the category 'track and field', so this figure includes some field athletes. Something slightly above 2% seems a reasonable estimate once these have been taken into account.

(who race over distances of 800m to 10,000m). Figure 12 also shows that track competitors tend to be significantly younger than any of the other groups. Indeed, the mean age of around 35 from the BRS survey may in fact be an overestimate, as the APS data suggests a mean of around 20. The BRS's modal figures for age may be more useful here, with a modal age of 19 for sprinting and middle distance track races compared to 37 for obstacle course races, 42 for all of the road racing forms, and 48 for fell-racing and ultra-racing. Figure 13 (page 168), which is based on BRS data, shows that there is a steep drop in participation in track races after the age of about 25. The lower level of cultural capital for this group (see figure 16, page 174) is in part explicable in terms of the large number of young people it includes – many are students yet to complete their education (22% compared to 6% of road runners). Economic capital (also figure 16) is similarly pulled down by the high proportion of students and other young people in this group, who tend to have lower incomes as many are not yet in work, or are at an early stage of their careers.

### **8.3.1 Running under the microscope**

The running track is a highly rationalised space, described by Bale (2004) as 'placeless' in that it represents the annihilation of geographic context and the realisation of a standardised topography designed to facilitate comparison and competition that transcends space and time. Whilst the idea of placelessness has limitations in that it fails to acknowledge that athletics tracks are situated within particular communities and are physical loci of sociality and face-to-face interaction, it does capture an essential and distinctive aspect of track athletics. Weiss (1969: 105), describing the ideal placeless setting for a race, writes that 'ideally a normal set of conditions for a race is one in which there are no turns, no wind, no interference, no interval between starting signal and start, and no irregularities to the track – in short, no deviations from a standard situation'. The race track represents the culmination of a history bent on the practical realisation of these ideals that dates back to Victorian times, albeit tempered by compromises such as the inclusion of bends to enable races to be contained within a manageable area and to facilitate the needs of spectators.

The ideals built into the architecture of the track all converge on facilitating and measuring the performance of the guiding principle of track athletics, namely, speed. In no other running environment is the fetishisation of speed, times and records so intense. Even training at the track is rarely about enjoying a steady social run as it can be on the road or in the countryside, rather it is about hard repetitions of set distances in set times, with measured rest intervals. Bale (2004) describes this as 'Taylorized training', and Huizinga (1916) as 'mechanised' sport, reflecting its industrial, disciplined and utilitarian ethos. As well as facilitating speed and measurement, the contained oval of the track also makes it possible for runners to be subjected to the unblinking gaze of spectators, coaches and other runners. Panopticon-like, the track allows onlookers to have permanent visual contact with a runner and to know exactly how fast (or slowly) they are running. There is no hiding place on the track. The combination of this heightened visibility and the narrow focus on speed was alluded to as both an important motivator and a significant barrier to participation by a number of respondents. For Ryan, a regional level 400m runner, the opportunity to showcase his speed in front of others was an important aspect of track athletics, but he recognised that the visibility it entails could put off many slower runners:

Ryan: I'll know so many people [at a big race] and they can see it, and I know that I'm going to be the fastest person at a county championships over my age group for 400m. And that feels really good, but I can see why if you knew you were gonna be a couple of seconds behind, a few seconds behind you just wouldn't - like for me I would possibly run less. I wouldn't do as many big spectator events... I think you wouldn't perhaps bother as much if you knew you weren't going to be competitive.

Interviewer: Do you think that sort of filters out, and makes it so that you get a certain sort of person?

Ryan: Yeah, I think it's people who know or think they're going to be the best anyway.

*(Ryan, 19 year old male student)*



This theme was also picked up in comments from Marie and Mark, both in their 30s and members of a local athletics club:

I think one thing that's deeper and quite important is when you run on the track, you can be seen. You are not lost in the mass of the London Marathon. All the long-distance runners, you're kind of lost in the crowd all the time. On the track... you know that if you're going to be slow and behind, people will know you're behind. So it takes a bit more, I think, awareness.

*(Marie, 33 year old female software engineer)*

You can't really hide on the track. There's no hiding. Everyone can see exactly how good or how bad you are.

*(Mark, 33 year old male software engineer)*

In the light of these comments it is easy to understand why the track appears an intimidating environment for many slower or less highly-trained runners. Fear of being shown up probably accounts for much of the lower participation rates by those who perceive themselves as less talented, and helps explain the low numbers engaged in this form of the sport. But along with the potential for feeling 'ridiculous' in Marie's words, the goldfish bowl-like environment of the track also provides successful runners with a stage on which to amplify performances of athletic identity.

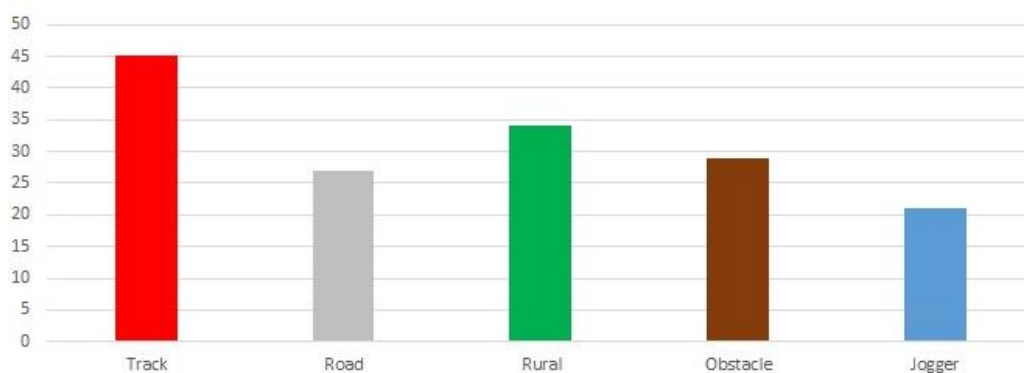
### **8.3.2 Athletic ideals**

Amongst the track athletes I interviewed, the running track was seen as the ultimate proving ground for particular forms of physical capital, which these athletes saw as distinctive and perhaps superior to those involved in the slower, endurance-based forms of running. This elitist orientation manifested in the pejorative name they gave to road runners according to Mark - 'high-vis athletes' - in reference to the brightly coloured or reflective clothing road runners often wear (compared to the more muted and traditional team vests of track clubs), and a sly suggestion that they are not really athletes at all. This resonates with the work of Fuller (2003) on rock climbers. Here traditional climbers who felt the

cultural capital of their climbing skills was threatened by the introduction of new technologies to make climbing easier, allowing novices to scale the same rockfaces as them, instituted a new classification scheme to differentiate between high status 'pure' and low status 'aided' climbs. And as well as this 'splitting' technique to maintain the distinctive status of his sport, Mark also appeared to use a 'lumping' strategy to devalue the practices of other competitive runners. He used the terms 'joggers' and 'road runners' interchangeably, in ways that would upset many who would put themselves in the latter category and regard themselves as serious competitors, not keep-fit joggers! And this distinction maintenance work went even further when he suggested he was uncomfortable with the idea that track athletes were even practising the same sport as many road runners:

I'm not sure it's really the same sport. Track and field, as a competitive thing is just not the same sport as people running to get fit and doing half marathons... and that sort of thing. I mean it's sort of the same sport in that you have to use your feet and put one after the other, but in all other aspects it doesn't really strike me as like the same kind of thing.  
*(Mark, 33 year old male software engineer)*

Sprinting and middle-distance track races are indeed significantly different physiological challenges to, for instance, running a marathon. Rather than the muscular endurance and cardiovascular fitness demanded by distance running, track races (especially sprints) require a distinctive form of athletic capital that emphasises explosive power, sprinting speed, strength and dynamism - in other words they require 'athleticism'. And indeed, track athletes in the BRS data were significantly more likely to describe themselves as 'athletic' than runners of any other group, as shown below in figure 24.



*Figure 24: Percentage of participants self-describing as 'athletic' for different clusters. Weighted by gender.*

Numerous authors have pointed to the link between hegemonic masculinity and athleticism, in the form of both performances of 'physical strength, force, speed... and domination' (Trujillo, 1991) and a particular 'look', that is, one characterised by lean, powerful muscularity (see Lanzieri and Hildebrandt, 2011). The relationship between track athletics, displays of dominance and physical power was manifest in Ryan's comments about male sprinters in particular:

The sprinters are so often big guys, huge muscles, they know they look good, they know, like, sprinting at the end of the day, it's who's fastest on the track, and that's what sounds impressive, right? Like Bolt can go out and say 'I'm the fastest man in the world, full-stop'... There's definitely like a, yeah, gym culture and sprinting... there is definitely like a big aesthetic aspect of doing it.

*(Ryan, 19 year old male student)*

Certainly, the idea of athleticism as a male preserve has a long history, dating back to ancient times and manifest today in unwarranted assumptions around female athletes' gender or sexuality. Numerous writers have discussed how this can create a tension that puts many women off taking part in some sports (see Steinfeldy et al. 2011; Butler et al. 2014; Blinde and Taub, 1992; Miller and Levy, 1996). Yet as we have seen, the gender balance in track athletics today appears to be close to typical across all forms of running (at slightly over 40% of the participant base), with women especially strongly represented in sprinting. At first blush this may appear surprising. Based on the literature one might assume

that forms of running that emphasise 'masculine' athleticism and overt, highly visible competition would be less appealing to women. But this apparent paradox can be understood if we consider both athletics and athleticism in their wider historical and cultural context.

Whilst the international bodies that preside over athletics were resistant to women's participation, especially during the first half of the Twentieth Century, research by Duval (2001) shows that at the level of local athletics clubs, women were encouraged to participate quite strongly. She shows that from the 1920s until the Second World War, athletics clubs were at the vanguard of a struggle to 'redefine femininity' around 'levels of physicality... competition [and]... freedom of movement' (2). Many women only clubs opened, and established men's clubs opened women's sections during this period, providing a rare opportunity for women from a wide variety of social backgrounds to participate in serious competitive sport together. Especially relevant here is the fact that even amongst many 'progressives' (of both sexes) the shorter distances competed over at the track were considered most appropriate for women, ostensibly for medical reasons (Duval, 2001: 13; see also Radford, 2012). This helps explain why the feminisation of the running track occurred many years before longer distance road racing underwent a similar transformation, and may be one factor in the significantly higher levels of women's involvement at the track today compared to the especially long distance road and rural forms.

The idea that sprinting could be considered more appropriately feminine than endurance running complicates the notion that athleticism is necessarily a signifier of masculinity, and also resonates with the BRS finding that women make up a larger proportion of sprinters than middle- or long- distance track racers. However, certain forms of athleticism associated with grace, speed, control, balance and poise – all characteristics of good sprinters - have been praised in women for at least a hundred years, although this has often taken a sexualised form: 'Newspaper reports on the Olympic Games in the 1920s... tended to sexualise female athletes... [focusing on] beauty and the feminine figure... sexualised representations and the focus on beauty and grace offset period fears of the masculinisation process supposedly engendered through

participation in sport' (Wamsley, 2007: 276). And even today, famous women athletes like multi-Olympic sprint gold medallist Allyson Felix are routinely described as 'long-legged and graceful', 'elegant' or as a 'beautiful runner' in the media - not epithets one can easily imagine being attached to male runners. So certain aspects of the kinds of athletic performance and body associated with track athletics appear to be compatible with a form of mainstream femininity. This may be reflected in the BRS data that shows 73% of women runners who self-describe as 'athletic' also rate their satisfaction with their body shape as at least five out of seven, compared to 53% of those who do not self-describe as athletic.

Today the athletic 'look' is increasingly popular with both men (see Grogan, 2016), and women (Martinez, 2015). For women this 'fit-ideal' (ibid) has become a mainstream beauty standard, promoted by magazines like *Women's Health* and *Fitness Rx for Women* ('Your Ultimate Prescription for the Perfect Body'), the April 2016 edition of which includes articles on 'hard core training' for 'amazing abs' and workouts designed to achieve a 'toned, sexy and strong' body (Fitness Rx for Women, 2016). The influence of the athletic look is further enhanced through being embodied by famous actresses, popular singers and social media personalities, and is reflected in comments from some of my female interview respondents:

I [want] to be fit rather than skinny, I don't really wanna be skinny but wanted to, you know, have good abs and be strong and... the idea of being a really fit human being really appealed to me.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*

I like how [running] makes me look, I like being active and fit and strong... I like having strong, slim legs, I like being... athletic looking.

*(Jane, 43 year old female medical sales rep and journalist)*

So, track athletics' relatively even appeal across genders, along with the special appeal of sprinting for women, needs to be understood in the context of athletics clubs' historical openness to women, and this form of the sport's

relatively good fit with contemporary ideals around both male and female beauty and athletic performance.

As mentioned above, age is an important variable structuring track participation. Again, it is this variable's relationship with athleticism that provides a way of understanding how this structuring is produced. Athleticism is closely associated in meaning and physiology with youth. Unlike the forms of physical capital required for long-distance running, which, amongst amateur competitors, can often show little discernible decline until runners are well into their 40s, the dynamic athleticism, power and speed required for success on the track is rarely maintained much beyond 30. As a result, older track athletes can find themselves falling off the pace and losing status within the field. Ultimately this can lead to them exiting the sport, as alluded to by the comments of Marie and Mark:

I've had injuries and things and I'm not particularly fast now. You end up running with younger people as well, plus I'm a bit tall so, and I know if I'm not going to be fast I don't want to be 200m behind someone on an 800m and I'm taller and older [laughs] so I can feel it... You do get people who are slower, and keep training. I might be one of them... But training is fine... and people have a bad day and you can maybe pass [them] so you can keep going... but... it's hard to go and compete properly.

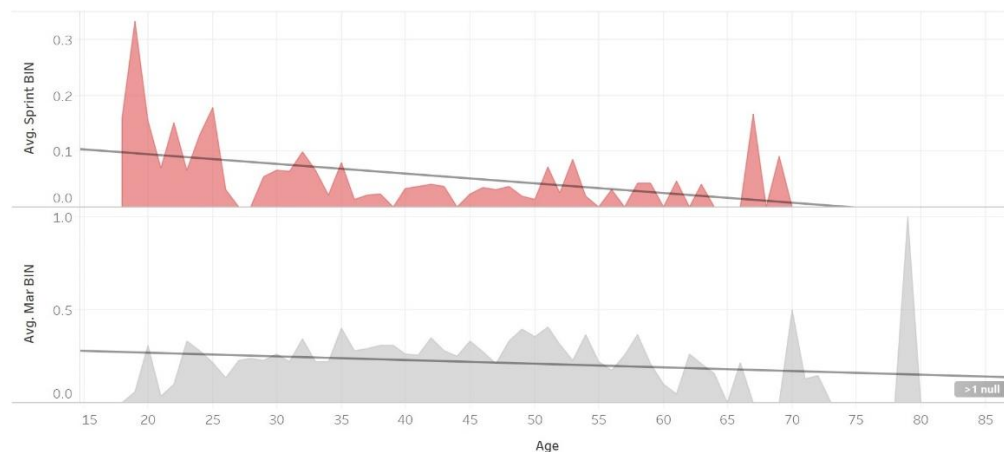
*(Marie, 33 year old female software engineer)*

I think if you're going to carry on you have to find an environment where your performances are still acceptable... I can't imagine anyone doing sprints and stuff into later age – old, but just being slow in faster races. I can't think of anything more depressing.

*(Mark, 33 year old male software engineer)*

This helps to make sense of the relative youthfulness of track runners, and the difference between the participation rates across age groups depicted in figure 25. Here we can see quite an abrupt drop-off in participation in track sprinting before the age of 30, whereas road running continues to increase in popularity for a further two decades. This implies that over a certain age, athletes tend to

withdraw from the field of track athletics as their ability to build sufficient levels of athletic capital to compete successfully fades. Mark and Marie's comments suggest that this is most keenly felt at the track because of the heightened visibility and the emphasis on speed as the organising principle of participation. However, the withdrawal of the majority of older runners from track athletics also creates an incentive for those few who are still willing or able to participate, in the shape of an opportunity to perform youthfulness (see Tulle, 2008). This might suggest a reason behind the spike in athletics engagement in the 65-70 age group depicted in figure 25, but further qualitative research focusing on this group in particular would be needed to explore this possibility.



*Figure 25: Proportion of sprinting and marathon participants by age, from the BRS data.*

The running track developed as a temple to speed and athleticism. It is a place where specific forms of athletic capital are observed, measured, developed and rewarded. As such it can be an unappealing environment for those with a more holistic orientation to running than simply achieving fast times or winning races, as well as for those who are not confident that they will be able to keep up with the pace. For those who can compete successfully there are significant symbolic and social rewards, with high status in the field attached to an elite identity that positions track athletes as a kind of running nobility, reinforced by the high levels of media coverage and attention this form of running receives. This can be understood as rooted in the history of track athletics, which since Victorian times has been one of creating and reinforcing a position as the universal standard of

competitive running through its emphasis on rationalisation and ‘placelessness’. However, the sterile rationality of the track is anathema to many runners whose motives and tastes extend beyond a desire to run as fast as possible. Rather than the artificial order of the track, many seek running sites that enable contact with the natural world and unstructured spaces of the countryside. It is to this environment that I turn next.

#### **8.4 Rural running**

Only 5% of those runners who completed the BRS questionnaire claimed never to run in the countryside, with 29% claiming to run there occasionally, and 66% stating that they ran regularly in rural settings. Even though these figures are likely to be somewhat skewed by the unrepresentatively large number of fell runners and orienteers who responded to the survey, it remains striking that so many runners choose to practise their sport in a rural environment when 80% of the UK population are now said to live in urban areas (Office for National Statistics, 2011). This seems to suggest that many people actively seek rural running routes some distance from their homes. We can find some clues to the appeal of the countryside in the MCA plots in figures 10 and 11 (pages 163 and 164). Here we can see that fell- and ultra- runners are most distinctive in dimension 3 (figure 11, horizontal ‘experience/goal’ axis), where they lie close to the extreme end of the axis associated with experience orientation. Habitual rural runners have markedly stronger motivations to explore, spend time outdoors and socialise with other runners than those who never run in the countryside. The high scores on socialising may be related to the fact that this group is also significantly more likely to hold club membership and to train with a group or team. It is likely that this, in turn, can be attributed in part to the high response rate from fell-running and orienteering clubs to the BRS questionnaire. Whether or not this is the case, the motivational data clearly shows that compared to road runners, track or obstacle course runners, engaging with and enjoying the *site* of running itself is a powerful motivating factor for many rural running participants. This is supported by the interview data discussed below.

Just like road running, rural running can, of course, take many forms, ranging from a solo jog around a field or through a wood to mass races on barren and



precipitous mountainsides. We can explore the varying demographic appeal of these ways of doing rural running through figures 12, 14 and 16 (pages 166, 170 and 174). Starting with figure 12, only orienteering stands out as having a dramatically older participant base than other forms of running, but gender provides a much clearer differentiator across and within the rural forms. Men dominate fell-racing, ultra-racing and especially orienteering. Only the more accessible form, trail running<sup>38</sup>, falls close to the sample's mean gender ratio. Figure 14 suggests that compared to other forms, rural running is associated with relative socioeconomic privilege, with high ratios of NS-SEC 1 participants compared to NS-SEC 5-8. We can break this down further to explore which particular fractions of the dominant class rural forms attract. Table 8 looks solely at NS-SEC 1 runners involved in various rural forms. It shows the proportions of the two occupational sub-groups that make up this category.

Form/group	Traditional professions & academics	Senior managers
All runners	69%	31%
Fell-runners	80%	20%
Ultra-runners	76%	25%
Orienteers	69%	31%

*Table 8: Percentage of NS-SEC-1 rural runners from different occupational groups and forms.*

For fell-running and ultra-running we can see somewhat higher proportions of professionals and academics compared to senior managers. This suggests an association with the culturally dominant sections of the dominant class (those relatively higher in education than in financial wealth). Orienteering, however, exhibits a similar profile to running as a whole. However, this masks the fact that

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<sup>38</sup> Trail running appears to have been interpreted quite broadly by respondents to refer to a wide range of off-road running locations.

orienteers are much more likely to be members of NS-SEC 1 than practitioners of other forms of running.

Because of the preponderance of men across the rural forms it is useful to examine reported levels of cultural and economic capital in a way that takes account of the effects of gender. This is possible by examining the data for men and women separately. Figure 16 shows the locations in two-dimensional space of rural forms along with others for male and female runners separately. We can see that whilst for both genders the rural forms are positioned at the higher end of the cultural axis, this effect is markedly stronger amongst men. We can also see that when we consider each gender separately, rural forms do not vary much from the mean in terms of the economic capital of their participants. This might be surprising in the case of orienteering with its high proportion of NS-SEC 1 participants, but this may be mitigated by the high number of retirees in this form of the sport - 27% compared to 7% in the entire sample.

I have mentioned earlier the limitations of my data with respect to ethnicity, but in the case of rural running – and fell-running in particular - it is worth highlighting the particularly low levels of non-white participation suggested by the data. 90% of the sample as a whole identified as ‘white British’ and 97% as either ‘white British’ or ‘white other’, but amongst fell-runners these percentages rose to 94% and 99% respectively. The sample sizes involved here are small, but as I will discuss below, the apparent especial ‘whiteness’ of fell-running would make sense in the context of other research.

Ethnicity aside, there are two distinctive social features of those engaged in forms of rural running that emerge from the BRS data: First, participation rates for men are significantly higher than for women, particularly in the forms most strongly associated with remote or rugged environments; and second, there is a relationship between high cultural capital and participation in rural forms, which is particularly strong for male runners. This latter characteristic is manifest in both measures of education (cultural capital) and in the higher proportion of professionals and academics engaged in these forms compared to senior managers. It should be remembered that levels of cultural capital amongst rural runners are high in relation to a running population which is itself well-endowed

in this capital, with over 70% possessing at least a degree level education in the BRS data.

#### **8.4.1 Class, ethnicity and masculinity in the countryside**

In contrast with bustling urban streets, crowded gyms or the constrained, rational space of the running track, the countryside is relatively devoid of other people, providing runners an opportunity to experience quiet, solitary running. According to Bourdieu, the desire to escape the madding crowd is strongly associated with the 'disinterested' posture linked to high socioeconomic status: 'Those who seek to prove their excellence must affirm their disinterestedness by remaining aloof from practices devalued by the appearance of sheep-like conformism... To distance themselves from common amusements, the privileged... need only let themselves be guided by the horror of vulgar crowds which always leads them elsewhere' (Bourdieu 2010: 214). Heading off the beaten track into the countryside provides runners with a way of avoiding the appearance of membership of the 'common herd', and of asserting a more refined, individual taste, which in turn positions them as a member of the high-status group. And indeed, a distaste for crowds and an attraction to quiet, natural surroundings was reflected in comments made by a number of my interviewees, for instance Jane, who described her ideal run as 'mountains, views, lakes, no people, and lots of little green dotted lines on an OS map.' The connection between the opportunities afforded by rural running for escaping the society of others and the disinclination of privileged groups for mass participation pursuits helps to explain the high proportion of high socioeconomic status participants in rural forms of running shown in figure 14.

But beyond simply offering a place to run apart from the masses, rural environments also provide a context in which to engage with the natural world. Atkinson (2010) describes how under the conditions of neo-liberal 'late modernity', traditional institutions along with the identities they legitimated have been de-centred, opening up opportunities for alternative practices and identities to emerge across a range of fields. He argues that in sport this has manifested in new forms of 'post-sport athletics' that reject modernist sporting values around competition, rationalisation, records and using the body as

resource, and instead espouse an egalitarian, spiritual and environmental ethic, keying into the needs created by late modern identity projects for ways of performing individualised cultural affiliations and values. Open countryside provides the relatively unbounded and unstructured spaces in which un-rationalised sports can play out, and also affords practitioners an opportunity to connect with the natural world in a way that feels meaningful – especially relative to social and cultural affiliations that have lost their traditional anchoring. The importance of attending to nature whilst out running in rural settings was described by many of my respondents, illustrated here by comments from keen fell-runners Mike and Olivia:

Oh, you wanna see the seasons change, it is absolutely stunning. You will look over the Severn valley and you will see the... the whole year. You know, you'll see it from the floods through to the - when it gets ploughed in... so you'll see the floods, then you'll see the crops going green, growing, horses, cattle, you just - sometimes you just [stop running and] sit up there and just watch the farmers ploughing. It is, it is stunning.

*(Mike, 53 year old male firefighter)*

There's nothing like running up over the moors... I just stood on the rocks, just stood there and took it in. That's another thing about fell-running... I always allow for gawking time. So I think that's really crucial, I think it's a fundamental aspect of fell-running. If you, if you don't take the time to also sort of drink in the beauty of where you are, then I don't think there's no point being a fell-runner really, because you have to - that's partly of why we do it, isn't it?

*(Olivia, 48 year old female writer)*

Nettleton (2013) describes the centrality of attending to and appreciating the natural landscape as an intrinsic part 'doing' fell-running, with shared experiences in nature central resources in fell-runners' social interactions and important elements of their group identity. This wish to (re)connect with a bucolic, natural world, to pay homage to it and to accord it special value is essentially romantic. It is an ethic that has been associated both with alienation from the natural world and the opportunity to view rural or wilderness

environments as a site of leisure rather than of work or subsistence. In these terms the physical conditions of the lives of well-educated people working in the professions or office-based service industries appear highly conducive to the inculcation of this romantic disposition. Not only do their jobs entail day-to-day alienation from the natural world of fields, woodlands and hills, but also from physical space itself (as opposed to the infinitely compressed virtual spaces of digital life). Furthermore, the economic advantages these kinds of occupations normally confer also make access to the countryside for leisure purposes relatively unproblematic compared to less well-off urban-dwellers. Carfagna et al. (2014) detect a particularly strong romantic bent amongst high cultural capital groups, reflected in lifestyle and consumption patterns based around environmental values, localism and a valorisation of the 'authentic' and 'natural'. From this point of view, rural forms of running such as fell-racing, orienteering and ultra-racing, provide a neat fit with high cultural capital eco-sensibilities. This extends beyond simply the environment in which they take place. It also includes their appeal in terms of the small-scale localism, tradition and non-commerciality of rural forms such as fell-running and orienteering. These characteristics fit closely with what Carfagna et al. identify as the desire of high cultural capital (highly educated) consumers for 'authentic' products and services – as opposed to the mass produced, the rootless and the commercial (see also Holt, 1998; Potter, 2011). Such sentiments were voiced by a number of interviewees:

One of things I love about fell-running and orienteering is that they're very minimalist, pure forms of racing. And there's no bells, there's no whistles, there's no support of any kind.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

Mike: Over a hundred quid for a pair of shoes that are gonna get covered in dirt and muck? Sounds daft to me. Fifty quid to enter a race where you're just gonna get covered in mud and dirt? It does sound daft to me as well. You know, a fiver to run up and down the hill that sounds sensible to me, and you've done a race. And you know at the end, when everyone has a laugh and a beer afterwards. I just think that the commercialism is just, in running

has just gone mad. And it's an industry now... it's becoming a money-grubbing industry...I think it's becoming not quite dirty yet, but there's certainly go-getters in there that 'right, I'm gonna run this event, I'm gonna organise that event' [mimes counting money]. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, your fell-running, although it's kind of being perhaps corrupted by that, there are pockets - local pockets - where it's still a pure sport?

Mike: Yeah, yes there is. Especially... in Shropshire, there's still quite a lot. And I think there is a, I think the fell-running ethos is still there. I always say at the beginning of an event, when there's new, you know, keep your eye out for each other. If someone's injured stop and help. You know. That's that. Doesn't matter if you're winning or not. Offer. If they say no, you've done your bit. Yeah. I think it's great I do, I just love it. It's just it's a fantastic sport, it's a fantastic way of life, and [it] might be a bit inward looking, but it is good. And I don't think that necessarily the old ways are bad.

*(Mike, 53 year old male firefighter)*

The relationship between rural forms of running, romanticism and the search for 'authenticity' appears to be a factor in rural running's appeal to high cultural capital runners, and – linked to this - the high proportion of professionals and academics engaged in these forms of running compared to managers (who tend to be higher in economic capital, but lower in cultural capital). But another factor at play here – as well as in the strong gendering of rural forms, as we shall see - is the link between some rural forms of running and the idea of adventure and danger. A number of interviewees described the appeal of 'wild', rugged and remote landscapes in terms of the risks and dangers they presented. Isolation, uneven footing, treacherous descents, changeable weather and the possibility of getting lost provide fell-runners and orienteers with a chance to challenge themselves, experience a sense of self-efficacy and of feeling truly 'alive', as illustrated by Gwen and Mike:

The idea of fell-running is to be able to go out and be totally self-sufficient on probably quite a remote course on the mountains, and I absolutely love that. It's up to you to choose your route, it's up to you to take your kit and make sure that you're, that you're safe, whatever's gonna happen.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

One day, minging weather, absolutely horrible, disgusting, I did a loop around the Three Tops and there was a really strong south-westerly wind, mad, absolutely mad. Rain coming down, it was just brilliant... came up the climb and you get to the old hill fort, and the wind is just on the top there, smashing into your face and you are the - the gods wanna blow you off the top of the hill. Yes. That's life... that was a top moment. That was like feeling really, really alive.

*(Mike, 53 year old male firefighter)*

Recreational risk taking has been described as an aspect of masculine gender performance (Fisk 2016; Peralta, 2007; Kay, 1998), and as a reaction against over-determined, over-structured and alienating modern lives (for instance, O'Malley and Mungford, 1994; Holyfield and Fine, 1997; Smith, 2000). A third perspective is offered by Lyng (2005) and Lyng and Matthews (2007), in which a more synergistic relationship between the institutional order of late modernity and dangerous sport is posited. Here the skills of managing risk, self-sufficiency, improvising and maintaining control under pressure, that are so vital in sports like fell-running, also correspond to the archetype for success in the unpredictable, shifting and provisional world of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). In this case the relationship between risky sports and late modern institutional life is one of reflection rather than reaction. Whichever is closer to the truth, the implication is the same - the closer a person is to the heart of modern institutional life, the stronger their taste for risky forms of sport is likely to be. And indeed this hypothesis finds support in the work of numerous researchers who have found that participation in dangerous sports, particularly those that pit the participant against natural hazards, is associated with privileged social status, with (reflecting the BRS data discussed above) highly educated, middle-class,

professional white men particularly likely to take part (Fletcher, 2008; Lyng and Matthews, 2007; see also Bourdieu 2010).

As I have mentioned, gender plays an important role here too. Dangerous (or seemingly dangerous) adventure sports, which emphasise self-sufficiency, courage, mastery over nature and physical skills, appear to fit many of the characteristics described as part of the idealised hegemonic masculine habitus (see Trujillo, 1991). Specifically, they appear strongly associated with what has been described as ‘frontiersman masculinity’, a variant of hegemonic masculinity linked to toughness, autonomy and the capacity to subdue nature – and anything else that stands in the ‘frontiersman’s’ all-conquering path (see Kimmel and Aronson, 2004). The masculine gendering of adventure and extreme sport is policed by a media that valorises men who take risks, whilst women can be vilified as selfish, driven and egocentric (Palmer, 2004). This may well put some women off participating for fear of censure, but also contributes to a culture that produces a more risk averse habitus in women and a more risk inclined one in men – at least in the narrow sporting sense considered here<sup>39</sup>.

In this context, one would expect the relevant generative social experiences of women who *do* possess a habitus disposed to ‘risky’ adventure sport to be markedly different from the mainstream. My interviews, which included three female fell-runners/orienteers, provide one potential model for how, through an interaction with social class, women could inculcate a more typically masculine risk-taking habitus. Specifically, it was notable that all three of these women had attended public schools that provided the chance to participate in adventurous activities and ‘expeditions’ in wild and remote places. Kerry and Gwen are quoted below:

At school we had these really great teachers that took us for walks and that's where I got my confidence in long distance. Like I'd know that I'm good. I can just keep going. I'm good at endurance, and I know that because we used to do these challenge walks at school, so it was either

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<sup>39</sup> Women may have the experience of choosing to ‘take a risk’ more commonly than men in other contexts, such as deciding to take an isolated shortcut home, or accepting a lift home from an acquaintance.



50 miles in two days, or 36 miles in one day... We went to Snowdon, and we climbed a few mountains... it was mainly the school that I did all my hiking. So, we used to go to Wales to do the challenge walk. We used to do the Ridgeway and the Jurassic Way as training walks... So, I did my gold [Duke of Edinburgh] like all the way through school... I liked the expeditions, and that's why I did it. I think there was a sense of like, being hardcore as well.

*(Kerry, 33 year old female magazine editor)*

The school was attached to the [Mountain] Rescue Service, so we used to go out a lot and train in the mountains and things like that and the school had three yachts, so we competed in yacht races, and one of the ones we did was the Scottish Islands Peaks race, where you sail, run up and down a mountain, sail, run up and down a mountain and so on.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

It is in the light of these kinds of experiences that we can understand these women's comfort with running in remote and mountainous locations, and how they may have inculcated something like a 'frontiersman' habitus, with its disposition towards self-reliance and competence operating in wild environments. However, the relatively high levels of cultural capital in both female *and male* rural runners suggest that these kinds of privileged experiences, associated with attending well-resourced public schools and universities, play an important role in building an adventurous disposition in both genders.

The low levels of ethnic minority participation in forms of running such as fell-running identified in the BRS data and described earlier are difficult to explore through my interviews because my interview sample only included white people – reflecting the 97% white profile of the BRS data. But it seems likely that an important factor here is the close relationship between the rural landscape and ideas of the traditional ethnic English, Scottish and Welsh identities (see Neal, 2009), and linked to this, the 'dominant notion of rural England'<sup>40</sup> as... an exclusionary white space' (Askins, 2009: 365). The countryside, unlike the

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<sup>40</sup> And presumably rural Scotland and Wales too.

multicultural city, may be perceived as monocultural and unwelcoming to ethnic minority groups, adding to the unfamiliarity and access problems experienced by many urban-dwellers irrespective of ethnicity. To explore this interest possibility fully would require further fieldwork.

Issues around access may also be a factor in helping generate the gender imbalance observed in rural forms of running. Just as in the case of training for competitive running described in the previous chapter, running in remote environments is usually more time consuming than simply going for a jog on the streets close to home. Fell-running or orienteering are not sports most people can engage in straight from their front doors, so often require travel time, and ultra-racing requires long periods of training (36% of ultra-racers train at least five times per week compared to 19% of the BRS sample as a whole). As such, these forms tend to place greater demands on participants' time, and are therefore less accessible to those who have low levels of flexibility or control in terms of the scheduling of their day-to-day lives. After having children, women have been shown to be particularly restricted in terms of leisure time, so their involvement in time-intensive forms of running may be especially vulnerable (see Craig and Mullan, 2013; Summers, 2007). This may be reflected in the BRS data, which shows that whilst 51% of male fell-runners are fathers compared to 49% of the entire male BRS sample, only 39% of female fell-runners have children, compared to 51% of the entire female BRS sample. Relatively low levels of participation by mothers appears to be one of a number of factors that help to shape the highly distinctive participation profile of rural forms.

### **8.5 Obstacle courses**

If rural running has associations with tradition, solitude and nature, the same cannot be said for obstacle course races<sup>41</sup> (OCRs). These highly commercialised and relatively recent additions to the running ecosystem offer a structured racing experience on carefully engineered obstacle courses designed to give the impression of danger whilst keeping actual risk to a minimum. Since 2009, when

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<sup>41</sup> There is very significant overlap in the scope and interpretation of OCRs and mud races – indeed they are largely interchangeable - and they are treated as one group for the purposes of this analysis.

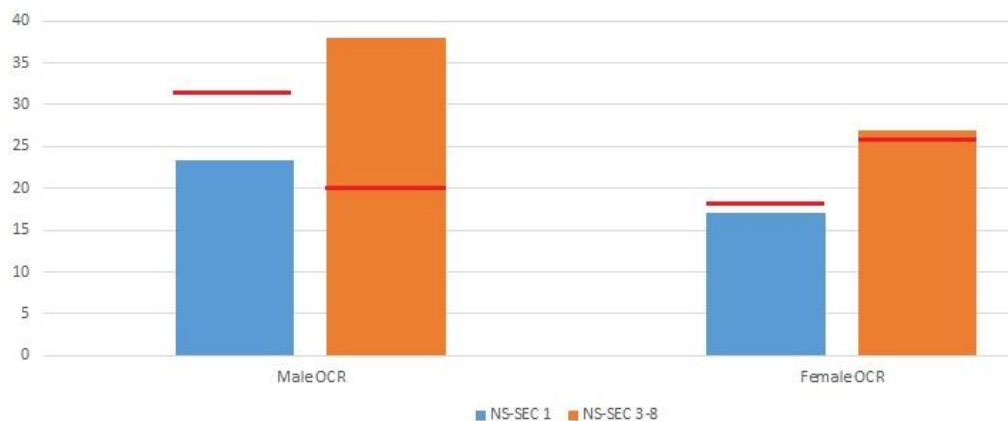
the first major obstacle course racing company, Warrior Dash, was formed in the USA, OCRs have grown from obscurity into an international industry with millions of participants. Companies like Tough Mudder and Spartan Race lead the way in the congested but lucrative British market, providing year-round opportunities to race on obstacle courses throughout the country.

The BRS data suggests around 10-15% of runners had competed in this form of racing over the last 12 months, but the more representative, randomly sampled APS suggests a much lower number of around 0.5% of runners. The latter figure (which translates to a little over 10,000 participants in England) seems dubiously low given the huge number of OCRs taking place across the country and the large number of runners in each race. It is possible that this may be a result of issues around interpretation of what an obstacle course is and how the questions were asked, but may also partly reflect the fact that the APS data was collected in 2014, and even since then OCRs have grown in popularity significantly. Heath and Aloia (2017) suggest around 250,000 people participated in OCRs in the UK in 2017, which translates to around 10% of the running population based on the latest APS data. This figure is in-line with the BRS findings and is probably a reasonable reflection of reality.

Figures 5 and 6 (pages 152 and 153) show that on the MCA plots, OCR stands out as the most social/community oriented form of running (dimension 4 – social/individual orientation), even though club membership and overall engagement is relatively low (dimension 1 – level of engagement). In terms of social variables, the BRS data suggests that OCR participants are more likely to be women than those of any other form of running apart from jogging (see figure 12). However, a review of results pages from recent OCRs casts doubt on this. These show men to make up a similar sized majority of finishers to a typical half-marathon road race. Why this disparity? Possibly gendered differences in completion rates for OCRs might contribute (i.e. more women participate, but fewer finish and get recorded in the race results), but the demographics of the BRS sample may be important here too. The mean age of male BRS respondents is 45, compared to 40 for females, and OCRs appear to be positioned to appeal to a younger age group. It is possible that the older mean age of male

respondents, largely driven by high levels of response from male fell-runners and orienteers, has reduced the proportion of men engaged in OCRs compared to women in the BRS survey.

Figure 16 (page 174) shows that OCR participants of both genders report below average levels of economic and cultural capital, although for women this effect is relatively small. For men, levels of cultural capital are especially low amongst OCR participants - well below those of any of the other forms. This latter fact appears to be linked to the occupational profile of male OCR participants, which includes a smaller proportion of high occupational class men, and much larger proportion of working-class men than we see across the entire sample. This is depicted in figure 26. Here, we can see the proportion of OCR runners drawn from each of four groups, defined by gender and membership of NS-SEC 1 or NS-SEC 3-8. The red lines indicate the mean proportions across all runners, allowing the reader to compare the size of each sub-group in OCR to that across runners as a whole. We can see that whilst for female runners (right hand pair of bars) the occupational profile of OCR is almost identical to runners as a whole, male OCR runners are much more likely to be of NS-SEC 3-8 and much less likely to be drawn from NS-SEC 1.



*Figure 26: Percentage of OCR participants grouped by gender and occupational class (bars) compared to the proportions for all runners (red line).*

This suggests that for men, OCR may play a distinctive role in the performance of class identity that it does not for women. I will discuss potential reasons for this below, but it is worth noting that this gendered difference in the degree of socioeconomic distinctiveness of OCR relative to other forms reflects a wider

pattern in the data: There is far less socioeconomic differentiation between women runners participating in different forms than there is between men (this is made visible in the greater spread of 'male' forms in terms of capital endowment in figure 16). What this seems to suggest is that different forms of running are in some ways more distinctive as performances of class identity for men than they are for women. I will explore this important observation more thoroughly in the Discussion.

The BRS data also provides a number of insights into the distinctive practices, opinions and motivations of OCR participants. For both genders these runners indicate the highest levels of motivation around improving their appearances and raising money for good causes of all racers. OCR participants also spend the least money on running (despite the relatively high cost of race entry fees for this form), and are least likely to have won a medal or represented a club. They run less frequently than other groups, and rate their body shape as being least like that of a runner. OCR runners of both genders are more likely to describe themselves as 'muscular' than any other group. Overall, they also rate themselves the least talented runners of all the race participants studied.

### **8.5.1 A digression into the marketing and the meanings of OCR**

Unlike the other forms of running described above, obstacle course racing is a recent addition to the field of running. It has had a meteoric rise over the last few years, driven by canny marketing keying into tastes hitherto overlooked by running's traditional institutions and event organisers. As such, a look at the kinds of marketing message and promotional tactic deployed by OCR companies is worth a digression at this point, both in order to contextualise the reactions of interviewees to my questions, and to understand the symbolic associations that are being actively forged through the discourse around – and emanating from - OCR.

Without an obvious historical tradition to draw on, OCR's promoters have worked hard to stake out their own territory within the field of running. This has been achieved through a deliberate process of building distinctive cultural

associations between OCR and particular virtues and identities, as well as forms of capital and status. This example from the Tough Mudder website is typical:

You'll emerge stronger, mentally and physically, and more disciplined and focused. Those benefits will serve you in everyday life. You'll be more comfortable in your own skin and have a more positive outlook. Don't be surprised if your relationships improve or you suddenly land a promotion at work... Because here's the true secret about Spartan Race: When you complete it, it completes you. (Spartan Race website, 2017)

Part of the process of building the distinctive cultural identity (i.e. brand) of OCR vis-à-vis existing forms of running has been cultivating an 'outsider', anti-establishment image that paints OCR as a corrective not only to what its promoters describe as the narrow sport of 'just' running, but also to the alienation and specialisation of modern life in general:

Spartan Race is not just an event; it's a way of life. It's also the solution to the chaos of modern-day life, a catalyst to simplify the way you train, eat, think, and live. (Spartan Race website, 2017).

Simultaneously then, OCRs package a kind of dissent from mainstream life (a marketing strategy familiar since the days of the counterculture in the US, see Heath and Potter, 2004) with a paradoxical promise of better performance in the rat-race. Promotional materials also emphasise characteristics not traditionally associated with running, including collaboration (working together to get over obstacles), excitement and 'danger' - the obstacles give the impression of danger, but are quite safe (see Heath and Aloia, 2017) - and in some cases, non-competitiveness:

With no podiums, winners, or clocks to race against, it's not about how fast you can cross the finish line. Rather, it's a challenge that emphasizes teamwork, camaraderie, and accomplishing something almost as tough as you are. (Tough Mudder website, 2017)

According to its promoters, OCR helps to develop all-round strength and conditioning, and 'functional' fitness applicable in a wide range of situations, as well as offering a stage on which will-power and team spirit can be developed

and performed (see Weedon, 2016). OCR events are positioned as ‘probably the toughest event on the planet’ (Tough Mudder website, 2017) and as races that will ‘test everything you’re made of: your strength, your endurance, your resolve’ (Spartan Race website, 2017). As figure 27 demonstrates, their glossy websites are replete with images and videos of muscular young men and women, caked in mud and sweat, hauling themselves through, over or under various obstacles, or alternatively, equally muddy and sweaty people of more average body shape smiling and laughing as they help each other clamber up walls or through pools of dirty water<sup>42</sup>. Often, the competitors wear ‘war paint’ on their faces and matching headbands, branded with the event organiser’s logo. It is all a far cry from the staid, solitary and stoical image of most traditional running.

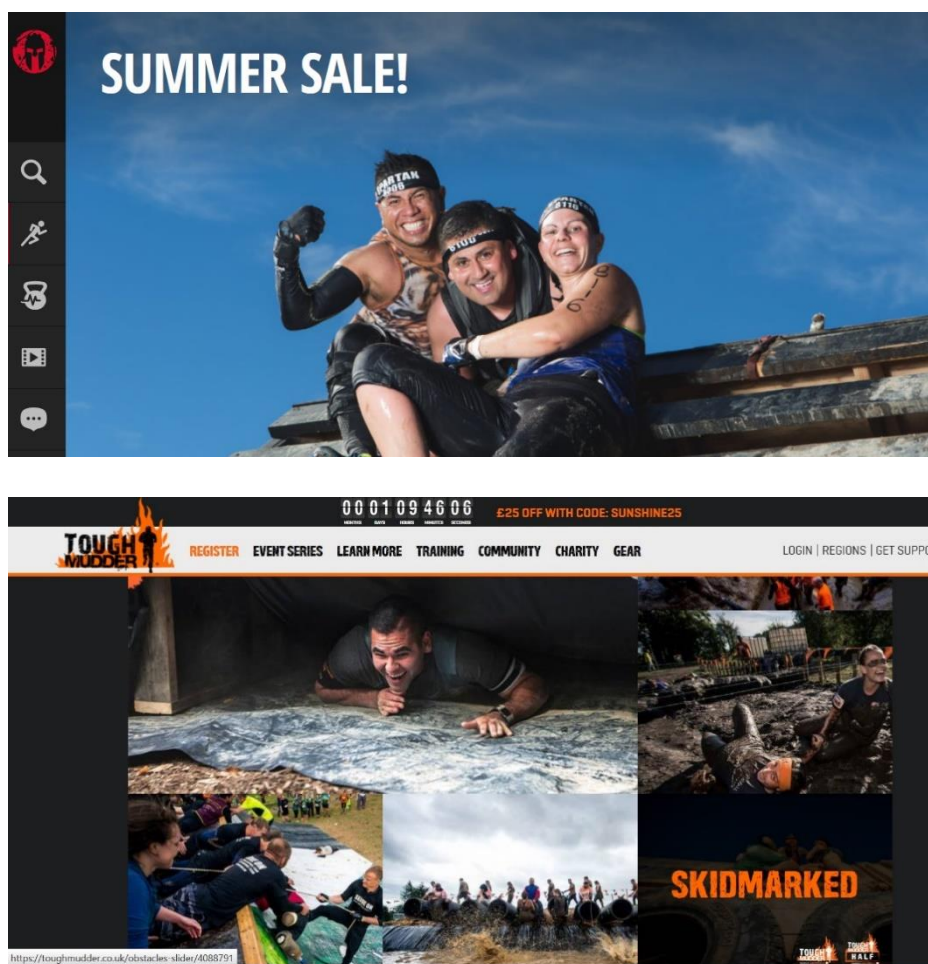


Figure 27: Images from Tough Mudder and Spartan Race websites and online advertising (continued overleaf).

<sup>42</sup> Of the market leaders, Spartan Race typifies the more athletic, competitive style of OCR whereas Tough Mudder represents that focused on teamwork, experience and having fun.

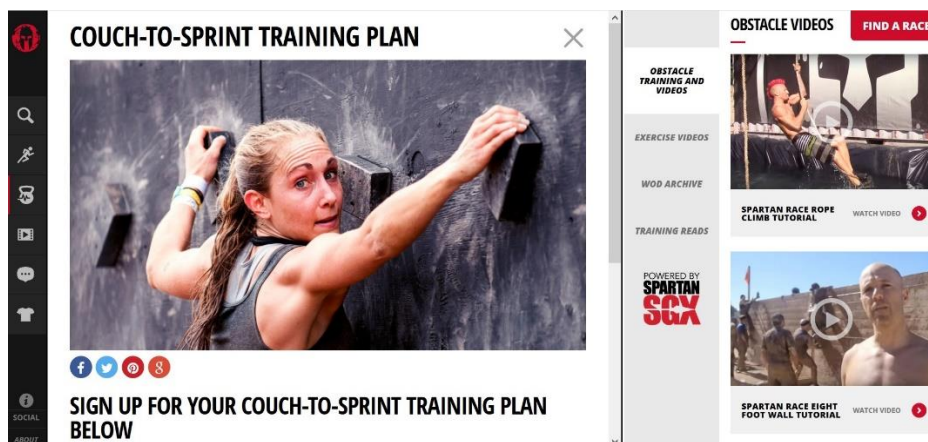


Figure 27: Images from Tough Mudder and Spartan Race websites and online advertising.

### 8.5.2 Understandings of OCR

The heavy promotional activity around OCR appears to be aimed at shaping its meanings in ways that differentiate it from other forms of running. This makes good commercial sense because – as we have seen – traditional forms can have connotations of elitism (both social and athletic) that may conflict with the habitus of large sections of the population, thus alienating large potential markets. And we have seen that OCR does indeed appear to be the form of running that can reach the parts others cannot, namely the working-class – or at least its male members. Before going on to examine the ways in which OCR is



understood by runners and how this might explain this form's success in opening up new regions of social space to the sport, I first want to examine how the very fact that this form of running *is* heavily marketed impacts on how it can be perceived by more traditional runners.

For several interviewees, the overtly commercial nature and rapid, profitable growth of OCR companies was a negative development in the sport. OCR events were seen by some as overblown, profit-focused and lacking in tradition and authenticity. During the interviews this manifested in refrains around the idea that OCRs were an 'impure' or unserious form of running - overburdened with unnecessary infrastructure and driven by greedy commercial forces compared to the pared back, ascetic traditional forms beloved of runners such as Gwen, Mike and Olivia, as illustrated below:

It's all razzmatazz and look how dirty I can get, and look, I just think - I don't know whether I'm an old bastard or something - but you think: what is that about? You know... they are just commercial enterprises. They don't, I don't know if they give things back, and they're being - the whole thing is being commercialised.

*(Mike, 53 year old male firefighter)*

I don't like the idea of having to make something much harder than it is by adding tank wallows and electric fences and god knows what else. I mean why not just go and find a really hard fell-race and run it, if you - you know - want to torture yourself for two hours?

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

It's kind of safe, managed, commercialised danger, or risk.

*(Olivia, 48 year old female writer)*

So, whilst OCR promotes itself as a 'critique of the perceived ills of modern life' (Weedon, 2016:36) some traditional runners view it as an *expression of* these very 'ills', namely commercialisation, superficiality and what they see as the shunting aside of tradition in favour of a globalised pop-monoculture. Mike's characterisation of OCR competitors as wanting to show-off about how dirty they

have got may reflect a distaste for both the social media spectacle element of OCR and a perceived lack of seriousness about the sport. These attitudes can be viewed as a manifestation of a clash between the culture and characteristics of OCR and dispositions of the 'eco-habitus' described earlier. The things that traditional runners claim they find unappealing about OCR - its scale, its commerciality, its 'razzmatazz', showiness and artificiality – are anathema to the locally rooted, ecological, pared-back authenticity-seeking values of this high cultural capital taste. This suggests one reason why OCR participation is associated with runners who hold relatively (for runners) low levels of cultural capital. However, as I have mentioned, this effect is by no means uniform. It appears much stronger for men. This seems to be related to gendered variations in the appeal of OCR to members of different occupational groups (see figure 26). Next then, I will explore some potential factors behind these differences – to suggest some reasons why occupational class appears to be so much more important a factor in OCR participation for men than it does for women.

One of the ways in which some OCRs are distinct from other forms of running is their rejection of running's traditional prioritisation of individual performance. Instead, many OCRs are team events that encourage teamwork and shared identity. As we saw earlier, participants in OCRs are encouraged to help each other over obstacles and not to leave anyone behind. There is an emphasis on having fun, bonding as a group and finishing together rather than on maximising performance and winning. As Tough Mudder claim, their 'Team Packages take team building to the next level' (Tough Mudder website, 2017). And indeed, this marketing rhetoric was reflected in the experiences of some of my respondents. Clara, a police detective, explained:

[An OCR] was something I wanted to do before I was forty. And we [she and her husband] just loved it. And it was just so much fun, and that actually made us feel, because we did it as a couple, because lots of people do it as groups of friends of ten and twenty... but actually doing it with your partner was a really nice way of helping each other round. And he does obviously bunk me up over the ten foot fences, and I wasn't

helping him particularly with those things, but it was nice for us to do it together, 'cos it kind of made you feel like a team again, and I really like that.

*(Clara, 40 year old female police detective)*

The social, fun aspects of OCRs were also picked up on in Dan's interview:

OCRs... have perhaps a bit more like a laddish culture... You know, guys who turn up to the Tough Mudders and they're doing it with the lads, or the girls - all the girls from work are doing a Tough Mudder, that sort of thing... and then it's usually in a town so you can go and have a drink afterwards and it's all like a big event, whereas a fell-running event or something like that, it just probably wouldn't even cross their minds, they do tend to operate in different worlds...

*(Dan, 21 year old male trainee journalist)*

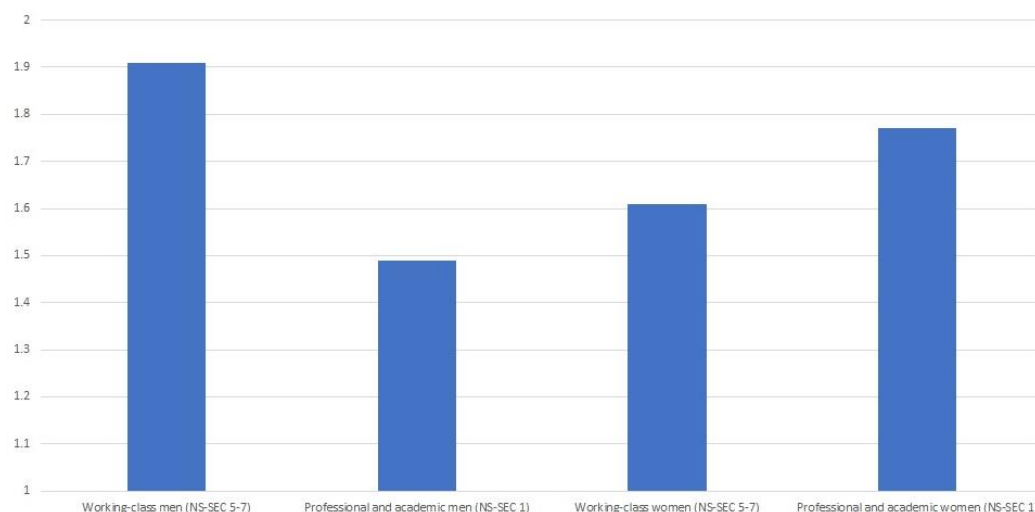
And Dan's comments about how he and other OCR runners perceived trail and fell-running help shed additional light on why some runners choose OCR over other forms:

I think a lot of people see trail running, fell-running especially as like a quite a - not like elitist, but it is restricted... They seem more extreme, you know, running up a mountain and stuff, whereas OCRs, they're tough... but they're more accessible...trail runners are more likely to be people from running clubs, or... people who are actually probably taking it a bit more seriously... [Fell-] running is fun, but it - to some people it can get a bit monotonous.

*(Dan, 21 year old male trainee journalist)*

OCR then, can be understood as running's distinctively exuberant, social variant. The collective activity and group identity associated with it (often symbolised by matching headbands and t-shirts) may be one reason for the low participation rate amongst middle-class men in particular. We can explore this possibility further through the BRS data by comparing the value placed on social element of running by different groups. Figure 28 shows the mean combined social

motivations (importance of socialising and community membership) of runners in four groups based on gender and occupational class. Supporting the above hypothesis, working-class male runners do indeed have a significantly higher (t-test,  $p=0.01$ ) degree of social motivation than professional males. Amongst women there is no significant difference based on occupational category. Of the four groups then, men occupy the positions of both most and least socially motivated, depending on their occupational class.



*Figure 28: Combined social and community engagement motivations for four groups categorised by gender and class.*

This supports the idea that submersion in a group identity and the social and team elements of OCR may be an important reason for their special appeal to working-class men, and that professional men may be put off a sport that clashes with key dispositions around self-reliance and individualism. This appears to be captured in another comment from Dan's interview, in which he describes the clash between the group values of OCR and his personal preference for individualised competition:

I did a mud run a few weeks ago with some friends, and we decided we're gonna run it as a group. That really annoyed me [laughs]... I was really annoyed, I really wanted to go and run.

*(Dan, 21 year old male trainee journalist)*

The social aspect of OCR, along with the 'danger', physicality and fun characteristic of images and experiences of OCR appear a good fit with

Bourdieu's (2010: 212) description of working-class male sports, which tend to emphasise strength, violence ('threat' and 'danger' in OCRs) and teamwork, as well as full emotional engagement rather than the maintenance of stoical 'bourgeois role distance'. This helps make sense of the high proportion of working-class participants and lower mean levels of cultural capital observed in male OCR runners.

The fact that we do not see the same classed pattern amongst women OCR competitors suggests that middle-class women share much more with their working-class counterparts in terms of dispositions towards individualism/teamwork, stoicism/expressiveness, and self-reliance/inter-reliance than do middle- and working-class men. One could speculate that this might be connected to the greater emphasis women from a wide range of backgrounds have been shown to place on social relatedness as opposed to individual competitive achievement across many contexts (e.g. Weber, Wittchen and Hertel, 2009; Estrada et al., 2011; Humbert and Muhammad, 2018). It might also be connected to a shared tendency to self-effacement (especially with regards physical competence) across mainstream forms of femininity, irrespective of class. In either case, the teamwork, shared responsibility and less competitive nature of many OCRs compared to other forms of running might appeal to women of all occupational groups. Indeed, OCR bears comparison with other sports popular with women, such as aerobics, bootcamps and spinning (exercise bike) classes, where women participate together, but not competitively.

In a similar way, the body shapes associated with OCR may also help to shape the gendered differences in the proportion of working-class people attracted to OCR. The marketing materials promoting this form emphasise 'natural' all-round fitness, which is contrasted positively with the 'specialist', narrow fitness developed by running (see Weedon, 2016). Whereas idealised runners are often characterised as having slender physiques, OCR competitors of both genders (see 20, above) are encouraged to build greater upper-body muscle and strength, both through photographic idealisations and training plans displayed on their websites. Several of my interviewees picked up on this feature of OCRs,

sometimes linking it to other popular fitness and body-shaping practices including CrossFit<sup>43</sup>, weight training and British Military Fitness outdoor fitness groups:

I think [OCR is] great for probably people who are into the whole CrossFit movement and everything, people sort of doing sort of using every muscle group in their body to kind of - you know you've gotta be strong and you've... still be able to run... I think they're probably great events for people who just really like exercising.

*(Jacqui, 21 year old female student)*

I did...Survival of the Fittest. And I get really competitive with those because my own personal training is a mixture of running and sort of like upper body exercise, so I kind of think OCRs, that's like the perfect marriage of the two... it's like a total body challenge.

*(Dan, 21 year old male trainee journalist)*

I've done a couple of those [OCRs] with - I did a lot of [British Military Fitness] for a time. And they do 5 and 10k obstacles.

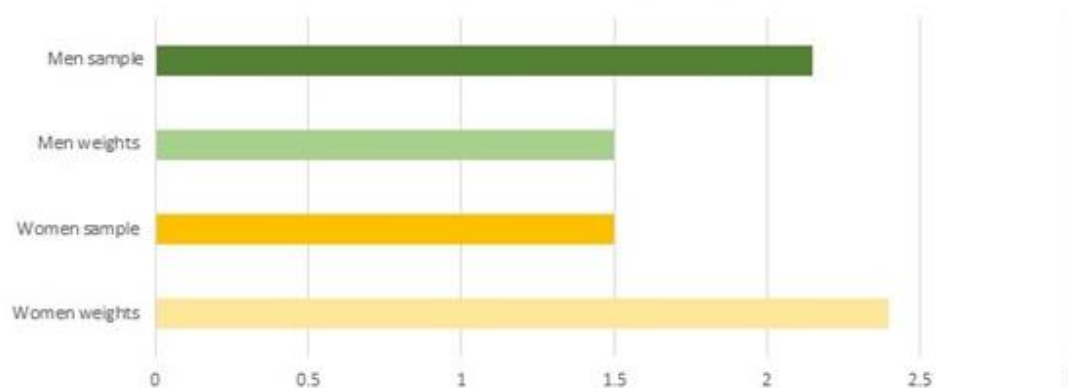
*(Jennifer, 37 years old female part-time teacher)*

We saw in figures 1 and 2 (page 106 and 128) that gym-based weight training activities designed to build muscle size tend to be linked to relatively high levels of working-class participation, and also to higher participation by men. The association between bulkier, more heavily muscled male bodies and working-class status is well-documented (see Bourdieu, 2010, discussed earlier), and this may be a factor in the greater appeal of OCR to working-class men – and why some middle-class men are put off. However, this association does not appear to hold true for women. Turning to the APS data, we find that whilst there is indeed a substantially higher proportion of working-class men compared to professional/managerial men participating in a range of muscle-building activities than in the wider population, the opposite is true for women. In other words, professional and managerial women are significantly over-represented

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<sup>43</sup> A branded fitness programme based on a varied regime of functional movements executed at high intensity.

compared to their working-class counterparts in activities that build muscle, as illustrated with respect to weight training in figure 29. This might support the idea of a rising 'fit-ideal' (Martinez, 2015) around middle-class women's body shapes that could help lend OCR a certain appeal to this group.



*Figure 29: Ratio of NS-SEC 1-2 (professional and managerial) to NS-SEC 5-8 (manual, routine and not in work) occupations by gender for entire APS sample and for weight training participants.*

Taking all of the above into account, it seems possible that whilst both high cultural capital men and women may find the commerciality and glitz associated with OCR unappealing (as suggested in the comments described above), this is tempered for women by the good fit between OCR style training and the fit-ideal body, opportunity for group participation and lower prioritisation of competition, as suggest by Gwen:

I think they're a good draw for people... who want to go and do something as a group that's challenging and different, and you don't have to do well, you just have to finish it to feel that lovely sense of achievement that you've done something really out there.

*(Gwen, 42 year old female, not working – retired actuary)*

For men, on the other hand, these same characteristics may reinforce the distaste for OCR amongst professional and managerial occupational groups, whilst increasing its appeal to the working-class. This could help explain the

especially low levels of cultural capital amongst male OCR participants relative to other forms, and the more balanced profile of female participants.

OCRs appear to have broadened the appeal of running activities, rejecting elements that imbue some of the more ascetic, competitive forms of running with their elitist image. But as we have seen, the reaction of some traditional runners to this popular new form may play a role in reinforcing and solidifying the social inequalities and cultural boundaries within the sport. By positioning OCR as not only unappealing but also ethically dubious and culturally damaging, practitioners of running's 'high cultures' simultaneously denigrate OCR and its crowds of lower social status participants, whilst reinforcing the value and virtue of their own (high status) and exclusive sporting practices and identities.

## **8.6 Conclusions**

Over the course of this chapter we've seen how forms of running practised in different environments can have very different cultural meanings and attract quite distinctive groups of participants. In part this can be understood as a result of differences in the cultures and infrastructures that have become attached to running in different places as a result of decisions made by powerful actors within the field. But the broader cultural meanings and physical characteristics of different environments play an important role in determining their fit with the habitus and resources of different groups too. We've seen evidence of the way these distinctions are understood within the field, with practitioners of different forms of running seeking to position their form as superior to others: Track athletes deride road runners as 'hi-viz athletes', fell-runners snub 'commercialised' obstacle course racing, the practitioners of which return the favour by describing fell-running as 'monotonous'.

The forms of running that an individual engages in are shaped by their access to resources, including time, access to the sites where a form takes place, and by their tastes. We have seen how experiences associated with social class and gender play important roles in shaping the habitus in ways that render some forms of running more appealing than others. As such, ways of running are translated into subtle signals of social position and identity. We have seen how,



for instance, running in remote, mountainous terrain speaks of rugged, self-sufficient masculinity and, less obviously, of cultural refinement, whereas running on a track suggests youthful vitality, and obstacle course racing can be redolent of communal, boisterous working-class identities.

However, another key finding is that the class and capital based variations between forms of running in different environments are much less significant amongst female runners than males. This could suggest that running offers a way of performing a wider range of distinctive masculine identities than it does feminine. But we also need to consider the practical factors that help shape these patterns. The high proportion of professional men amongst fell-runners might, for instance, result from this group having especially high levels of control over their time through their powerful positions at work and at home. I will explore this and other possible explanations for this finding in the final chapter.

Over the last four chapters I have mapped out the field of running, identifying clusters of motivation and practice, and describing their social profiles. Drawing on qualitative evidence I have suggested some of the reasons for these relationships, and what kinds of identity work different ways of doing running might function as. Drawing these findings together, the final chapter will discuss some of the key insights that can be drawn from this study, highlighting how they contribute to the sociological understanding of running itself, as well as to issues around the study of lifestyle and identity performativity more generally.

## Chapter 9: Discussion and conclusions

# Running and society

### 9.1 Questions and answers

The overarching goal I set out to achieve with this research was to identify and explore the different ways running is implicated in the reproduction of social identities in 21st century Britain. Over the course of the preceding four chapters I have approached this problem from a range of perspectives, deploying a combination of methods to map out the relationships between ways of running and social groups, and exploring these relationships through the words of runners themselves.

Throughout my findings chapters I have addressed my four key research questions in detail, but in this final chapter I want to draw out the main contributions this research has made to the understanding of running as a social practice, and to ways of studying social practices more generally. To this end, I have identified four themes that I will discuss in detail. Each bears on my research questions in different ways.

The first theme I will discuss, ‘worlds within worlds’, focuses on the methodological novelty and results of using Bourdieu’s field analysis tools, which are normally deployed to map hidden relationships between widely varied cultural practices in social space, to deconstruct and map the internal structure of what is ostensibly a single practice. This theme addresses the first two research questions, namely:

*To what extent can recreational running be understood as a set of distinctive sub-practices?*

*How does social position influence the ways people engage in running?*

The second theme, ‘a world apart’, also helps answer the latter of these two questions. It explores the important role of forms of physical capital and perceptions of competence in structuring running participation, and how they

might help make sense of gender differences in the sport. This theme also contributes insights relevant to questions three and four, which are:

*Through what processes are social characteristics connected to people's choices about how they engage with running?*

*How do different ways of doing running contribute to the reproduction of different social identities?*

The third and fourth themes also address questions two, three and four. Theme three, 'standing out and fitting in', focuses on the ways my research enriches our understanding of running as a potent medium for the performance of a range of middle-class identities and virtues. Here I also draw attention to how wider social position is marked *within* running through particular performances and practices. The fourth and final theme, 'through gendered lenses', highlights how gender (including through its intersections with class) mediates engagement in running, through the interaction of habitus, capital and field.

At the outset of this study I expected to use the two kinds of data generated by my survey and interviews to answer different research questions. In fact, whilst one method might have yielded more useful insights for a given question, I often ended up combining quantitative and qualitative data in an integrated approach. Each of the themes I discuss below has, therefore, been informed by both quantitative and qualitative data. I hope that this helps provide a more complete, nuanced picture than would have been possible using the two sorts of data separately.

## **9.2 Worlds within worlds: Using Bourdieu's tools to dissect a social practice**

From the start, this project was designed to explore the idea that running, as a category of social practice, could be best understood as a set of distinctive sub-practices that enable the expression of a range of quite different (and sometimes contradictory) identities. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (2010: 209) alludes to this possibility when he describes sports as sites where different social groups tussle 'over the legitimate way of doing [the sport]'. However, because his interests lay in describing macro-scale patterns of social practice and taste rather than the internal dynamics of particular practices, he did not pursue this line

systematically; given the scope of his project the task would have been overwhelming.

Existing quantitative research that analyses the social characteristics of runners often follows a similar line, treating this huge and diverse sport as a single modality within wider studies of lifestyle or sporting practice (e.g. Warde, 2016; Bennett et al. 2009, Coulangeon and Lemel, 2009). This is an understandable and practical approach, but means a potentially enormous loss of information to those who are interested in understanding the nuances of the sport at a deeper level. Studies that do explore running specifically tend to fall into two categories: Those that provide deep and rich qualitative accounts of a particular group or experience, but lack the capacity to situate their subjects systematically in the context of the wider sport (e.g. Hockey and Collinson, 2017; Nettleton, 2013); and quantitative studies that enable different groups of runners to be identified based on variations in motivation or simple metrics of practice such as racing frequency, but lack detailed information on fine-grained practices as well as any sense of what these variations mean in runners' lives (e.g. Borgers, Vos and Scheerder, 2015; Forsberg, 2012; 2015). Often this latter group of studies focuses solely on road runners, which is justifiable in so far as they make up the bulk of the running population, but limiting in that other forms of running can be quite different in terms of social composition, practical characteristics, institutional structure and ethos.

The approach I chose to use to overcome these limitations was to apply Bourdieu's established field analysis tools in a new way. Bourdieu and those who have followed him (e.g. Bennet et al. 2010; Hovden and Knapskog, 2014) have used his thinking tools and methodological approach (described in chapters 2 and 3) to construct broad maps of lifestyle or taste involving heterogeneous practices/characteristics from a wide range of areas such as artistic knowledge, food preferences, sport involvement and musical taste. My approach, however, was to use the same tools to unpack a single practice into its constituent parts, and then to map patterns in how these elements related to each other to identify styles of running analogous to the lifestyles described in broader field analyses. Once these empirically rooted styles of running and their relationships

were identified it was possible to compare and contrast them in terms of social variables, and to explore the lived experience and values of runners engaged in different styles of running through interviews.

By first deconstructing the monolithic idea of running into granular components and then reconstructing it through multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), I was able to reimagine the sport as a multi-dimensional field of practical and motivational positions that runners could take up. The space defined by the field was structured by axes relating to degree of engagement, competitive/self-care motivation, enjoyment/goal orientation, and individual/social orientation. Encouragingly, these fundamental dimensions resonated with past efforts to generate typologies of runners. The primary 'engagement' axis of my field, for example, echoes Doupona Topič and Rauter's (2015) study, which used survey data to categorise runners into three groups: Incidental runners, enthusiastic participants and serious participants, based on levels of running and racing frequency. More detailed typologies such as those suggested by Forsberg (2015) and Vos and Scheerder (2009) also broadly align with my findings, suggesting categories based on running frequency, competitive motivation, individual/community orientation, health and fitness motivation, and goal orientation. All these variables map quite well onto the four main dimensions generated by my study.

Beyond these similarities however, my use of field analysis contributes a much more detailed depiction of running practice and its relationship to social factors than has been achieved before. This is not only because my data covers a much wider set of practical and motivational variables than other studies, but also because the results of the analysis are presented as fields rather than as typologies, allowing for a more detailed, nuanced and layered understanding of the overall landscape of running practice. The typologies described above, for instance, cannot account for the overlap between certain orientations, or shed light on how they can combine to help generate strong demographic patterns. The field approach, applied to a large battery of modalities, allows for an almost unlimited number of these kinds of relationships to be depicted and analysed, whereas the typology approach is, by its very nature, fundamentally reductive.

Using Bourdieu's field analysis also allowed me to explore relationships between quantitative patterns of practice and the qualitative experience of running in new ways. Quantitative and qualitative data could be strongly connected because interviewees could be located precisely in the quantitatively generated field, making it possible – amongst other things – to shed light on whether and how distinctions between different ways of doing running apparent in the statistics were experienced by runners themselves. For instance, I was able to use Clara's words to illustrate how managing body weight can loom large as a motivator for individuals occupying the 'self-care' end of the second multiple correspondence analysis dimension (which opposes self-care and competition), and could access rich descriptions of the experiential pleasures associated with running in nature for runners like Mike, who occupied the extreme 'experience seeking' end of the third dimension (goal/experience orientation). A mixed-method approach has rarely been deployed to study running before, and when it has (e.g. Doupona Topič and Rauter, 2015) runners have only been differentiated in terms of a broad typology, for instance based on how frequently they ran or raced. Using my approach, individual interviewees could be located at unique and precisely defined points within the field.

Another major extension on previous quantitative work on running was the inclusion of runners from outside the road running community. This greatly increased the diversity of reported practices and motivations, and allowed me directly to compare forms like athletics, fell-running and obstacle course racing with each other and with mainstream road running in terms of motivational and practical orientations and demography. Previous surveys have either neglected these minority approaches to running, failed to differentiate between them, or collected sub-samples that were too small to be statistically robust.

My hope is that I have shown how Bourdieusian field analysis offers a useful way of thinking about running (as well as other social practices) that is sensitive to its internal variations and social patterning, and can help generate meaningful insights into a practice's role in social reproduction. Of course, there is nothing new in the techniques I have applied, but I have used them in a new way. Rather than using them to 'zoom out' from the level of practices to that of overarching

lifestyles, I have used them to 'zoom in' on a single practice in order to expose its inner workings and constituent parts, whilst remaining attentive to how the structures within the sport relate to and reflect those of wider social space.

### **9.3 A world apart?: The pivotal role of perceptions of talent and physical capital**

My analysis has identified numerous ways in which runners' social characteristics are related to the ways they engage with the sport. Gender, age, ethnicity and occupational class were all found to structure running practice in different ways. Related to this, individuals' stocks of cultural and economic capital (measured through the proxies of education and income) were found to be related to the field's structure and with levels of engagement in different forms of running. For instance, fell-running was found to be associated with higher cultural capital participants than obstacle course racing, and running very long distances was associated with high economic capital. Supporting Bourdieu's homology thesis (see Coulangeon and Lemel, 2009), the ways these variables related to running practice often appeared to have strong 'structural resonance' (Middleton, 2002: 9) with their role in other fields. For example, fell-runners' preference for a pared-back, uncommercialized experience chimed with a wider association between high cultural capital groups and authenticity seeking (Carfagna et al., 2014; Potter, 2011), and the teamwork and sociality involved in obstacle course racing, which was associated with low capital volumes within running, appears to fit more closely with wider working-class tastes for activities that emphasise shared identities over individualism than do other forms of running. In other words, the organising logic within running often replicated patterns found in wider social space. As Bourdieu argued, generalised patterns of taste and their relationship with particular social groups are translated into the vernacular of individual fields, enabling broad social differences to be reproduced throughout society.

So, the way running is structured reflects some of the wider patterns of practice related to variations in habitus and resources distributed in social space. But beyond this, my survey data also shows that another characteristic with little relationship to these wider structures plays a central role in the field of running. This characteristic is an individual's perception of their own running talent. We

saw in the multiple correspondence analysis maps in figures 7 and 8 (pages 154 and 155), that a runner's self-perceived talent (rated on a scale from one to seven) was strongly associated with their position in the field: High scores were associated with higher levels of engagement, competitive participation and individual orientation. Within the field, high self-perceived talent runners also show more indicators of field-related symbolic capital such as winning medals or representing a club in competition; and of central importance, they are also more likely to be men than women, the ramifications of which I will explore below.

Perceived talent is thus of great importance in structuring running practice. Indeed, perceived talent scores are broadly comparable to gender in terms of their *independent* predictive power with regards field position<sup>44</sup>, though as we shall see, talent also interacts strongly with gender to help structure the field socially. The important role for perceived talent in the field of running has some interesting implications in terms of how we characterise the field and its relationship to wider social space. As well as this, the structuring power of perceived talent takes on additional meaning when its role in mediating the relationship between gender and engagement in the sport is evaluated. In this section I will describe my study's original contributions in these areas in detail.

The two important topics around perceived talent, (A) characterising the field, and (B) mediating gender effects, hinge on different interpretations of what having a high or low perceived talent score signifies. When, later, I address issue B, gender mediation, I will focus on an interpretation of perceived talent that is close to the notion of 'perceived competence'. But first, in addressing issue A, the characterisation of the field, I suggest that perceived talent can be viewed as an imperfect (because, for instance, it is mediated by gender) indicator of field specific physical capital. After all, it seems a reasonable assumption that most runners who scored themselves highly on 'running talent' did so because their experience suggests they are physically capable of running faster or further than

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<sup>44</sup> Independent predictive power is assessed here via multiple regressions using positions along the four dimensions of the field as dependent variables to measure the independent effects of gender and talent.



many other runners. Of course, the correlation between self-rated talent and an individual's objective physical ability to do well in races is not perfect, but there seems to me to be strong face validity to the idea of considering perceived talent as a strong *correlate* of running related physical capital. This then, is how I will interpret the variable in the section below.

#### **9.4 Physical capital's role defining the field**

If we accept, as I argue, that we can interpret perceived talent as an imperfect proxy for field specific physical capital, we can infer from its important structuring role in the multiple correspondence analysis maps that physical capital is a central social currency within the field. This makes sense. The embodied capacity to run very far or very fast is vital to achieving symbolic capital in running through its conversion in races. For those runners (the majority according to my survey, see chapter seven) who are to some extent competitively minded or attach value to running far or fast, building stocks of this resource through regular training can be a – often *the* - key motivation that drives their engagement in the sport. The centrality and high value placed on physical capital in running suggested by my data provides new, quantified evidence to support arguments made for its status in previous qualitative studies relating to sport and physical recreation such as of gym workers (Maconachie and Sappey, 2011), boxers (Wacquant, 2004) and road cyclists (Rees, Gibbons and Dixon, 2013).

The importance of running related physical capital in structuring practice within the field, together with this resource's relative lack of utility outside of it, could help explain why running (like other sports) is sometimes described as a 'world apart' (see Young, 2014) where the normal and complex rules of social life are temporarily exchanged for a simple system based on otherwise irrelevant competencies. Some writers have argued that this supposed suspension of wider social rules and statuses is a large part of what gives sport its appeal as an escape from daily life (Lyng, 2005) or a social pressure valve (Elias and Dunning, 1986). But of course, as we have seen, whilst the ability to run fast is not directly useful to most people in their working or home lives, the symbolic capital it affords can be. In chapter seven, for instance, I described how the ability to run very long

distances is perceived to be associated with mental toughness that implies a capacity to cope with the kinds of risk and responsibility associated with high status jobs. I have also described evidence linking extreme running performance with hegemonic masculine ideals of athleticism and self-sufficiency (see chapter eight). Indeed, even for those runners who have not achieved large stocks of physical capital, the very fact they are *trying* to improve their fitness or athleticism gives off 'virtue signals' (see chapter six) associated with the healthy lifestyles of the middle-class.

What this research shows is that it is possible to ascertain quantitatively (albeit imperfectly) the degree to which a field is structured by an ostensibly local capital, and hence its potential for being considered an 'escape', outside the rules and hierarchies of everyday life (whether this status is illusory or not). Further, it demonstrates how it is possible to assess whether this capital's apparently local value belies relationships with wider social variables that might imbue it with socially reproductive qualities. This kind of analysis gets to the heart of the rationale of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Practices that appear 'disinterested' or of pure, intrinsic value provide the medium through which existing inequalities can be reproduced through their hidden, misrecognised relationships with forms of generally transposable capital. By deploying this kind of detailed analysis, the true extent of a field's ostensible independence from wider social structures can be assessed.

### **9.5 Perceptions of talent and gender effects**

In a sense, in the first part of this section I have focused on the 'talent' element of 'perceptions of talent'. In the next part I will focus on the 'perception' part of this construct. Specifically, I will explore the relationship between perceptions of talent and gender, and how this might help explain gender differences in running engagement.

As I have described, the BRS data shows a strong relationship between runners' perceptions of their own talent and their degree of competitive engagement. Those who see themselves as good runners are significantly more likely to participate in races, and hence to accrue large volumes of symbolic capital within

the field. These findings reflect those of a wide range of sociological and psychological studies that show a relationship between perceived competence in an activity and competitive/goal orientation (e.g. Jagacinski, 2013; Ryska and Yin, 1999; Martin and Gill, 1991).

Individuals' perceptions of their talent or competence are, of course, linked to their levels of field specific cultural/physical capital; we have a good idea about where we sit in the pecking order. But our perceptions of our own ability are not always accurate. Our beliefs about what we are capable of are shaped by often limited personal experience in a given arena and filtered through the culture, beliefs and prejudices we have internalised about what 'people like us' are capable of (see Kitayama and Markus, 2000, for example, for evidence of large differences in the self-perceived competence across cultures). In other words, habitus and its fit with the field in question plays an important role in shaping our perceptions of competence, and in turn, the ways we engage in a given activity.

In chapter seven I described my finding that female runners, on average, rated their running talent as 3.5 (mode: 4) out of 7, whereas males rated theirs as 4.2 (mode: 5). Just as has been found by researchers in many other fields (e.g. Hargittai and Shafer, 2006; Bowker, Gadbois and Cornock, 2003; Jagacinski, 2013), female participants systematically rate their level of competence lower than their male counterparts. Connecting this to the link between habitus-field fit, perceived competence and competitive orientation described above, we can infer that women's lower levels of competitive engagement and accrual of symbolic capital in running might be linked to a poorer fit of the traditional feminine habitus with the field of running compared to the masculine. In other words, that the field of running is gendered masculine.

As I have shown throughout this thesis, many of the cultural meanings and virtues linked to high status in the field of running – whether relating to competitive success or to extreme and distinctive forms of the sport – are closely associated with aspects of hegemonic masculinity such as athleticism, competitiveness, self-reliance and risk-taking. I have also discussed how the organisation and nomenclature of running events, and the language around

mental and physical toughness reinforces associations between running performance and masculinity. From a practical point of view, I have examined how women, and especially mothers, may be restricted in their ability to dedicate the large swathes of time to training necessary to compete successfully in running. The result of this web of factors is that running is a field that is dominated by and shaped in the image of men. As such, men come to the field like 'fish to water', whilst women may feel less at home, and thus less competent, resulting in less competitive engagement and lower status, thus reinforcing the distributional characteristics of the field that help generate the sense of its relationship with forms of masculinity.

Other researchers have found a similar relationship between the gendering of a field, perceptions of competence and resulting levels of achievement. Jagacinski (2013), for example, has shown how whilst male and female psychology students rate their ability in the subject the same, female engineering students rate their domain competence significantly lower than their male counterparts - even though their grades show no difference at all. Engineering departments, unlike those of psychology, are, Jagacinski argues, strongly gendered domains. Mirroring my findings in running, she argues that this can lead to underachievement in the long-term, because 'low competence perceptions are associated with... a preoccupation with avoiding failure rather than a focus on approaching success' (644). One can see how this 'avoidance of failure' might translate into running as the relative 'avoidance' of race participation by women suggested by the BRS data.

I have discussed some of the ways gender habitus might be shaped to create a mismatch between femininity and the field of running. In chapter seven, I described how early sporting and PE experiences have been identified as important influences that help generate gendered orientations to sport, competition and even uninhibited movement, leading to lower perceptions of competence amongst girls and women (see Redelius et al., 2015; Butler et al., 2014; Barr-Anderson et al., 2008; Constantinou, Manson and Silverman, 2009). But my data also sheds new light on the formative experiences that can create

exceptions to this rule – the circumstances that support the development of a competitive sporting habitus in women runners.

Through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative evidence, I have identified several factors that appear to influence the development of a ‘well-fitted habitus’ to the field of running and thus, perceptions of confidence. First, I noted that there is some evidence that – as Bourdieu’s theory would predict – women who have spent a long time engaged in the field of running become increasingly competitive, whilst there is little change in equivalent men. This may reflect the gradual internalisation of the field’s ‘masculine’ *doxa* over time. Secondly, I found that the women I interviewed who were very competitive had all had unusually strong parental encouragement in sport, particularly from their fathers. Exploring similar issues, Hellrung (2009) and Han (1994) also found that parental and wider support was crucial to girls’ sustained engagement and success in sport in ways that were not necessary for boys. Thirdly, amongst the highly competitive women I spoke to, all had had what could be characterised as ‘privileged’ upbringings. All but one had been to public school, all had gone to university. And through these educational contexts, all described having easy access to facilities, coaching and experiences that many less privileged people would struggle to obtain. So, more opportunities and access, greater support and encouragement and more control over time to train and adapt to the field of running would all, it seems, help increase women and girls’ engagement in extreme and competitive running. But of course, more modest and practical changes to the field itself might help to have the same effect.

### **9.6 Standing out and fitting in: Running’s fit with the values of the middle-class**

My field analysis of running has demonstrated that *within* the sport, perceived talent, gender and age are all more important structuring variables than class. However, when we consider running’s location in social space *vis-à-vis* other practices, the centrality of class to running participation patterns becomes clear. In chapter five I used data from Sport England to calculate the relative number of participants in a range of sports who come from NS-SEC 1-2 occupations (professionals and managers) compared to those from NS-SEC 5-8 (manual occupations and not in work). In these terms, running showed a similar class

profile to sports like tennis and mountaineering, which have amongst the most elite social profiles of any mainstream sport. In chapter five I qualified this further, by showing that running draws an especially high number of participants from the upper reaches of the occupational class structure, with senior managers and traditional professionals (those high in both economic and cultural capital) particularly well-represented.

When running's classed nature first came to light early in the running boom, it came as a shock to many of running's promoters and practitioners. The realisation that marathons could be characterised as 'a bunch of rich people being cheered along by a bunch of poor people' (Free to Run film, 2016) was disconcerting, and seemed to contradict the egalitarian simplicity many saw as the key appeal of the sport. Yet, as this thesis has shown, running's social exclusivity can often be an important part of its appeal; in the words of one runner, it 'isn't going to attract yobboes is it?' (Walker, 2018). Unlike any study before it, my research has unpicked the seeming paradox of running's egalitarian yet elitist image systematically, identifying the many distinct linkages based on resources, power, taste and symbolism, that connect running to various sections of the middle-class and weave into the powerful and well-established overall relationship between class and the sport (see Sheerder, Breedveld and Borgers, 2015). In this section I want to draw a number of these relationships together under the overarching theme of running as a performance of 'self-determination' – a virtue with particularly strong links to the contemporary middle-class. I will also describe a second, linked theme focusing on the fit between running and the organisation and infrastructure of modern life. First though, I will quickly recap some essential ideas about the nature of modern Western society that help contextualise and explain the special value placed on self-determination and individualism (particularly) amongst professional and managerial classes today.

In chapter four I described how the rapidly increasing appeal of running generally and amongst the middle-class specifically over the last forty years or so needs to be understood in the context of significant changes in the values and social architecture of western society over the same period. Importantly, the growth of the sport from the late 1970s onwards coincided almost perfectly with the

emergence of neoliberalism as the guiding philosophy of US and UK economic policy. But also, enormous changes in information technology occurred over the same time span, including the rise of the internet, smart devices and social media. A number of theorists have argued that these changes can be connected to a transformation in the structure of organisations and relationships, with a shift away from a model characterised by hierarchy, community, stability and high commitment based around specific physical sites, to one defined by loose, ever-shifting alliances of spatially dispersed 'networked individuals' (see, for example Wellman, 1999; Castells, 1996). Simultaneously, so the argument goes, competition between deregulated private firms has replaced state provision in many areas, with the 'invisible hand' of the market supposedly ensuring efficiency and standards. The ethic of free competition is also seen as having been applied to citizens themselves. With unions weakened, the capacity for collective bargaining has been reduced, and with the increase in short-term, project based, 'solopreneurial' or 'gig' jobs, many people find themselves in a perpetual cycle of competition for work just to keep their heads above water.

Drawing on these kinds of ideas, writers like Giddens (1991) and Bauman (2000; 2007) have characterised our epoch as one of 'ontological insecurity', or as 'liquid modernity', a period of constant flux, where lives, relationships and identities are episodic and fluid, untethered and uncertain. Numerous other researchers have described the powerful influence of such socioeconomic conditions on individuals' values, behaviours and selfhoods, especially in relation to their degree of individualism (see Greene, 2013; Henrich et al. 2010; Nisbett et al., 2001), and today's culture is one in which, some argue, the competitive, agile and self-starting entrepreneur has become the heroic model of the idealised citizen (Storr, 2017). From this perspective, the ability to take control of one's destiny, to exercise agency, to lead rather than follow and to retain independence – never relying on the goodwill of others - has taken on especial value in today's culture. And running, I argue, is the emblematic leisure pursuit of this atomised, entrepreneurial and image conscious society. Below, drawing on my research findings, I will describe how, in its various forms, running provides a means of performing the self-determination and individualism so valorised in

contemporary culture, and how, paradoxically, it is possible to interpret this performance of agency as an expression of social conformity.

### **9.6.1 The well-managed body**

Perhaps the most obvious ways in which running enables the performance of self-determination that I have discussed in this thesis relate to its use as a 'technique of the self' in relation to managing the appearance and health of the body. We saw in chapter six that whilst female runners were more likely to express motivations around the management of body weight and appearance, a large majority of both genders acknowledged at least one of these factors as part of their reasons for running. Almost universally, runners also expressed achieving 'fitness' as a goal – although precisely what this might mean appears to vary between individuals and groups. For writers such as Giddens (1991), the body offers a site where identities undercut by the 'ontological insecurity' of modern life can be asserted – a solid, corporeal island in the ocean of liquid modernity. Another watery metaphor is provided by Juvin (2010: xii), who describes the body as 'a truth system' from which 'we expect a reality that is elsewhere leaking away'. Bodies, in other words, appear to offer a uniquely stable, knowable medium from which social identities can be fashioned and projected. As this thesis has shown, running represents a powerful way to do this kind of corporeal identity work, and of building and maintaining physical capital in aesthetic, athletic and health related forms.

Slimness was idealised by the middle-classes long before the running boom, but recently, scholars have argued that the kinds of toned and athletic physiques associated with running and fitness more generally have become especially valued (see Abbas, 2004; Grogan, 2016; Martinez, 2015). For a large proportion of my survey respondents (particularly women) the goal of achieving an aesthetically pleasing body through running was important, but even more prevalent was the motivation to lose or manage weight. Fat, as well as being viewed as unattractive by many runners, is also taken to imply immoderation, laziness and irresponsibility - sins often associated with a disparaging stereotype of the working-class (Herndon, 2005; also see Throsby, 2016). As such, and as my interviews showed, fatness can elicit disdain and even disgust from many (mostly



middle-class) runners. Possibly this may reflect a view of fat as 'uncivilized' in Elias's sense, in that it is seen to betray a lack of control over the body that has long been associated with a lack of middle-class decorum (see Elias, 2000). But middle-class feelings about fatness also need to be understood in the context of the rise of healthism and neoliberal governance (Mayes, 2016). Under such conditions, those who fail to show the outward signs of living up to norms of personal discipline and self-management can be stigmatised not only as failing themselves, but also of irresponsibly burdening the community as a whole. Running then, offers a way for the middle-class to actualise a habitus disposed to industriousness and corporeal discipline, manifest in the slim 'runner's body': A body that symbolises self-determination, responsibility and 'civilization'.

The finding of runners' near ubiquitous desire for fitness can also be understood in terms of healthism and self-determination. If the slim body is the outward manifestation of the moral, disciplined body, the fit body is one that is disciplined internally too. Its implication of smooth, efficient, *invisible* physiological functioning places the fit and healthy body at one end of a continuum of *civilization*, the other end of which is represented by the uncivilized, chaotic, undisciplined 'dys-appeared' (see Leder, 1990) sick or faulty body. Fitness then, like slimness, can be understood as a goal and symbol of virtuous self-determination and control.

However, the existence and policing of norms around body shape and keeping fit alert us to a paradox in the idea of running as a performance of self-determination. As Foucault's work on governmentality highlights, this self-determination is exercised in a very specific direction – a direction that is determined by power. What kind of self-determination is it, after all, that involves compliantly sweating and struggling one's way to becoming a 'docile' citizen with low body mass index, resting heart rate and projected NHS utilisation? From this point of view, and in the light of the strong views about fat and inactivity expressed by some of my interviewees, runners could alternatively be fulfilling other traditional middle-class roles, as both adherents to and guardians of conformity.

### 9.6.2 Discipline and self-determination

Over the course of this thesis we have seen that the performance of self-determination through running is not limited to its use as a tool for achieving desired body shapes. It is also expressed through runners' lifestyles and acts of running and racing. In chapter seven we saw how committing to a regime of training and sticking to it can be interpreted as a display of self-discipline or personal agency, for instance. We also saw how 'mental toughness' or staying power is perceived as an important quality for runners in races. But this research has also contributed new, empirically-based findings that reveal there is much more determining the ability of runners to dedicate time to training or to run great distances than mere willpower. The ability to perform these types of self-determination is, paradoxically, highly structured. Individuals' stores of capital and hence their power to dictate how they and other people use their time influence their ability to commit to demanding training schedules, which in turn influence runners' ability to perform 'mental toughness' by running great distances. My research provides new insights and evidence around how these inequalities help to strengthen the classed (and gendered) nature of running participation, with forms of running that enable the most 'extreme' displays of mental toughness and control, such as fell-running and ultra-marathoning, dominated by highly educated white men from the top occupational groups.

Given the highly structured nature of performances of self-determination and personal agency through running revealed by this research, we again have to question the idea that maintaining a demanding training regime or finishing an ultra-marathon race should be considered uncontroversial expressions of these attributes at all. An alternative interpretation could be that such performances are acts of conformity to dominant norms that signal membership of particular privileged social groups. Poulson (2016: 86), after interviewing lifestyle athletes involved in a range of sports wrote that, 'by far, most of the athletes I interviewed were highly conformist with respect to both societal norms and the norms imposed by their sport'. They were also overwhelmingly privileged middle-class men. Brohm (1987) and Bale (2004) also draw attention to the obedience to structure and rule following that is often intrinsic to running. In this

light, running might be best understood as a way of actualising a *conservative habitus* linked to socially dominant groups. By this, I mean a habitus disposed to comply with, promote and police the norms that support the existing social order – one that is premised on self-interested competition, individualism and personal responsibility (see Lyng and Matthews, 2007; Cederström and Spicer, 2015).

### **9.6.3 An assertion of independence or making a virtue of necessity?**

Throughout this thesis I have presented evidence that the contemporary culture of individualism, with its focus on the self, on self-care, and on competition and personal responsibility, is highly compatible with running for symbolic reasons such as those described above. But the compatibility between late modernity and running also extends to linked changes in the practical experience and infrastructure of everyday life. It is this aspect of the relationship between running and modern life – and particularly middle-class life – that I want to focus on now.

I have characterised running, with its focus on individual achievement, self-improvement, personal health and wellbeing, and lack of requirement for team mates or playing partners, as the individualist's sport *par excellence*. In his seminal work on the atomisation of Western society, Robert Putnam (2000) famously suggested 'bowling alone' as the emblematic leisure pursuit of the age, but perhaps 'running alone' would have been even more apt. This is particularly true in relation to the networked nature of modern individualism (see Wellman, 1999), with many runners habitually practising their sport alone, then uploading details of their runs to social networking websites like Strava to share and compete with people they have never met in person (the obsession with metrics and data is another defining feature of the digital age; see Muller, 2018).

As attested by several of my interviewees, running appears particularly well-adapted to the lifestyles of a highly networked, geographically dispersed and mobile (and sometimes rootless) 'global middle-class' (see Koo, 2016) or 'creative class' (Florida, 2002), who increasingly work flexibly, from home or remotely. These kinds of lifestyles contrast strongly with those associated with many traditional working-class jobs, which remain embedded in particular

geographical locations (e.g. the factory) or serve specific local communities (see Miles and Legunia, 2018 on the correspondence between geographical mobility and social class). One implication of this is that whilst running may be symbolically associated with independence and control, its high and growing levels of popularity amongst the middle-class may also reflect a narrowing of opportunities for engagement in more communal, club or team-based sporting practices amongst this group. Several of my interviewees described part of their reasons for taking up running as related to the closing down of other options – rugby, football or even going to the gym – which had become untenable because of their lifestyles, particularly in relation to their inability to commit to regularly attending group training sessions or to mustering enough friends for a game. Running then, could be understood as the last redoubt of the physically active, a fall-back option deployed when the pace and pressure of modern working life dislodges them from place and community-based sporting practices.

As well as looking at the ways running reflects the nature of wider society, I have also described how it can be a site of resistance to the atomised and technologically mediated character of modern life. Many fell-runners, for instance, seek a pared back, 'authentic', infrastructure-free version of running that provides a link to nature, community and place that appears eroded elsewhere. Whilst I was writing this chapter it was announced that the Welsh Fell Runners Association (WFRA) had adopted new rules banning the use of GPS navigation in races because it 'threatens the fundamentals of our sport' (BBC, 2019). Fell-running, the WFRA argue, is a 'simple sport', involvement in which should involve only 'mountain-craft' and fitness (see WFRA GPS policy notice, 2018). Whilst these fell-runners may be resisting technological encroachment, they are certainly not challenging the individualistic tendency in the sport. Indeed, they can be seen as promoting an even greater reliance on self-sufficiency and personal resources by denying the possibility of outsourcing navigational work to a gadget. In keeping with a Bourdeusian analysis of the role of cultural capital in establishing distinction through sport, critics of this ruling argue that forcing people to learn the 'dark arts' (i.e. the embodied cultural capital) of mountain navigation makes the sport even more elitist and

inaccessible than it already is (see BBC, 2019). Certainly, the traditionalists appear to be using this ban to shore up the symbolic link between fell-running and individual self-sufficiency in ways that my research suggests are likely to make it even more attractive to the authenticity and exclusivity seeking middle-class professional men who already dominate the sport (whether this is the conscious intention or not).

#### **9.6.4 Summarising the relationship between running and the middle-class**

In this section I have tried to pull together the various practical and symbolic strands connecting the contemporary middle-class to running that I have described in this thesis to explain the well-established overall classed nature of the sport. Other writers have looked at specific elements of this relationship before, particularly around self-care in relation to health and the body (e.g. Pelters and Wijma, 2016; Abbas, 2004; Bourdieu, 2010), and to a lesser extent, serious leisure (e.g. Elkington and Stebbins, 2014), risk taking (e.g. Lyng, 1990) and authenticity seeking (Atkinson, 2010). But I assert that the overall statistical relationship between running and class can only be fully understood by considering all these linkages in combination, with different sub-groups within the middle-class population responding to each in different ways. We have seen, for instance, that the romanticism and individualism of fell-running taps into the tastes of especially high cultural capital groups, and has particular appeal to men. Middle-class women appear more likely to be drawn to running as a way to achieve weight loss rather than to compete (at least to start with), whilst those (particularly, but not exclusively, men) rich in both economic and cultural capital tend to be attracted to forms of running that involve impressive feats of endurance.

The link between traditional forms of running and the austere, individualist streak that appears especially strong in masculine middle-class taste is further exposed by juxtaposing these forms with the new obstacle course style races (OCRs). OCRs, as described in chapter eight, often promote a much less individualistic model of running that can demand teamwork, encourages sociality and greater levels of emotionality, and is accompanied by a level of razzmatazz, hype and social media-based marketing unlike that around most traditional

aces. My participation data shows that compared to other forms, OCR has much less appeal to professional and senior managerial males than to their working-class counterparts. This pattern is not replicated in female runners, for whom the performance of self-determination through running appears to be more closely related to disciplining the body than to particular kinds of athletic feat.

I have also argued that the middle-class proclivity for running is far from simply being a matter of taste. The atomised, mobile, flexible and busy but sedentary nature of middle-class life today makes running one of but few sports that many people can practise reliably and regularly. Practical considerations appear likely to play an important role in channelling certain social groups towards the sport.

Running then, through its diverse forms, appears perfectly adapted to a range of tastes associated with different parts of the middle-class, and offers a convenient and practical means of fulfilling them. Ideas of individualism and self-determination run through this analysis and connect the tastes and lifestyles of the middle-class to wider contemporary socioeconomic conditions. Here, Foucault's concept of governmentality is especially useful. It makes sense of the way in which the highly tuned self-discipline apparent in many runners emerges in response to external, morally-charged norms and an emphasis on individual choice and responsibility that has become a dogma of our neoliberal age. As such, running may offer the perfect leisure pursuit for the privileged and the upwardly mobile; it is a convenient and efficient way of embodying the attributes most valued in our individualistic, competitive and responsibilised society and economy, and of living a life that satisfies both moral and aesthetic tastes.

### **9.7 Through gendered lenses: The role of gender in shaping running practice and meaning**

Whilst class is the most important social variable predicting running participation *per se*, the BRS data suggests it is gender that is most important in shaping variation in practice and motivation *within* the sport. My field analysis approach has provided unprecedented quantitative detail in this regard, allowing direct comparison of different ways of doing running by gender, and providing powerful evidence for interpreting how running caters to the tastes and

preferences of men and women in different ways. My multiple correspondence analysis, as well as more traditional descriptive statistics, suggest that the fundamental difference between men's and women's engagement in running centres on contrasting emphases on competition and self-care.

Motivationally, as we have seen, the gendering of these orientations is quite clear. Men are significantly more likely to value competition, and women are significantly more likely to express goals around the management of the 'self', particularly around weight and appearances, but also, to a lesser extent, around psychological wellbeing. Expressed motivation though, is a somewhat controversial concept, and can be understood both as a report of the driving force behind behaviour, and as a *post hoc* rationalisation of socially structured, emotion-led or habitual choices (see Vaisey, 2009; Brekhaus, 2015). Care then, has been taken in interpreting what these motivations signify. They have not automatically been assumed to be causal, and in the context of gender, have sometimes been discussed in the context of the 'cultural repertoires' perceived as appropriate for a man or woman to report. For example, in chapter six I suggested that men may prefer to draw on tropes of competitiveness rather than those of concern for body image, even in cases where the latter might be more accurate in terms of why they participate in the sport.

As well as for motivations, we also need to take care in considering the underlying reasons for the gendering of practice. I have drawn attention to the ways in which some forms of running appear to be gendered by practical considerations and access as well as by differences in taste or motivation. I have discussed, for instance, how women - and mothers in particular - can face greater barriers to participating in forms of running that demand large time commitments than men due to imbalances in power within relationships as well as household and caring labour. There is some intriguing evidence to be found in the BRS data in this regard, where, for instance, the proportion of those women who expressed an interest in fell-racing<sup>45</sup> who reported actually participating in such events in the previous year was much smaller (34%) than the equivalent proportion of men (54%). This is not true, however, for more mainstream and

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<sup>45</sup> Also true of ultra-marathon participation.

accessible forms of race such as half-marathons (women 65%, men 67%). This suggests it is not a lack of interest or motivation that limits many women's participation in fell-racing as much as access to the necessary resources (including time) to engage in this form of the sport.

So, as I have tried to describe in the preceding chapters, the reasons for gendered participation differences in running are complex, sometimes opaque, and can be interpreted in a number of ways. However, in this section I want to focus on two phenomena that have emerged from my research that I believe capture centrally important things about the role of gender in running. The first of these is how gender appears to mediate the forms of distinction that individuals are likely to assert (and be able to assert) through running. And the second focuses on the role of gender in structuring differences in how fitness is embodied and performed through the sport.

### **9.7.1 Gender and distinction within running**

The effect of gender on running practice appears strikingly evident in relation to some forms of the sport in particular. The BRS data suggests that fell-racing and ultra-marathoning, for instance, attract a markedly higher proportion of men than women, whereas for jogging (non-competitive running) the opposite is true. Throughout this thesis I have discussed how access to resources, social norms and tastes (fit between habitus and field) play important roles in generating these differences, and how these patterns can, in turn, reinforce the symbolic meanings and appeal of the different forms. Here, I want to draw these findings together and to explore the key ways the gendering of running is (re)produced.

The first finding I want to draw attention to is that when a form of running included in the BRS showed a significantly gendered participation profile compared to the mean, it was almost always men who were overrepresented, and particularly men from the highest occupational categories. Orienteering, fell-racing and ultra-marathoning all showed a significantly higher proportion of professional and managerial males than other forms of the sport. Setting aside the statistically questionable gender position of obstacle course and mud races (see section 5.6), and of track sprinting, which has a relatively low sample size,



only jogging suggested a higher female participation rate than male. And in a sense, jogging is not a 'form' in the same way as the others included in the survey. It is defined by a *lack* of participation in any form of racing. So, in terms of engagement in specific institutionalised forms, none showed unambiguously feminine gendering. What this suggests is that there may currently be no specifically feminised form of running. Forms are either broadly equal in appeal to men and women or are significantly more attractive to men. This seems to echo, in microcosm, findings from wider studies that show that, 'numerous forms of sport are generally constitutive of the masculine identity' whereas feminine identities are supported by a smaller range of options (Plaza et al., 2017: 202; see also Messner, 2011).

The second important finding here is the existence of gendered differences in the spread of forms of running along axes of cultural and economic capital. Here, although the rough relative positions of the forms are similar for men and women (though there are some differences), the differences in economic and cultural capital between the forms are much larger for men than they are for women<sup>46</sup>. This is illustrated in figure 16 (page 174), where the locations of obstacle course racing and fell-racing are spaced far apart in terms of cultural capital for men (OCR being associated with much lower cultural capital than the mean, and fell-racing with much higher), but show little difference to the mean for women. Also relevant, the relationship between race distance and economic capital is very strong for men (Spearman's rho of 0.143,  $p < 0.0005$ ) whereas for women it is much weaker (Spearman's rho of 0.066,  $p = 0.019$ ).

How can we make sense of these patterns? Broadly, I have presented evidence for both taste/identity and practical/resource explanations. Taken together, they point to a combination of factors. Part of a taste-based explanation could be that 'extreme' forms of running like ultra-marathons and fell-running do not appeal to the tastes and identities associated with traditional femininity. I have discussed how these forms of running appear to be associated with rugged, masculine 'frontiersman' identities, with their links to hegemonic masculinity,

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<sup>46</sup> This difference cannot be accounted for by difference in the spread of economic or cultural capital by gender. Male and female runners reported similar ranges of values for these attributes.

and certainly, the women I interviewed who did participate in this kind of running were aware of their unorthodox gender performativity, describing themselves as 'macho', for example. Indeed, there is good evidence for lower levels of interest in fell-running and ultra-marathoning amongst women, with only 38% and 28% of female survey respondents expressing an interest in these two forms respectively, compared to 57% and 39% of men. As well as dissuading female participation, the themes of self-sufficiency, adventure in nature and risk-taking around extreme forms of running like fell- and ultra-racing might also be especially attractive to the professional and managerial male runners who make up such a large proportion of their adherents (see Lyng and Matthews, 2007). Conversely, obstacle course racing with its sociality, teamwork, commerciality and 'artificiality' might be especially *unattractive* to these high cultural capital males, driving down their participation relative to lower occupational groups and to women generally, and helping to generate the low cultural capital association with OCR amongst male runners revealed by the BRS data. Indeed, the strong aversion to OCR exhibited by fell-running 'purists' underlines the role of distaste in shaping participation patterns – as Bourdieu reminds us, 'tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by... visceral intolerance of the tastes of others' (Bourdieu, 2010: 56).

Taste and identity then, appear likely to play important roles shaping the ways men and women run. But more practical considerations are at play here too, and help to shape and reinforce the social distinctions between forms of running. I have described how, for most people, access to a form of running like fell-racing is more demanding in terms of economic resources and time than, for instance, road racing or jogging. People who have money and control over their time are therefore more likely to be able to take part in this type of running than those who do not. I also described how within families, men often have more control over their free time than women (see Craig and Jenkins, 2016), making committing to time consuming forms of 'serious leisure' like running more viable for men. In the same vein, it was notable that none of the female fell-runners I interviewed had children, and statistically, whilst men with a young child (under 2) in the survey data were more likely to report having taken part in a fell-race in

the last 12 months than men without children (40% compared to 28%), women with young children had less than half the participation rate of non-mothers (6% compared to 14%). Taken together, this suggests that if fell-running requires very high levels of resources, particularly time, privileged men, who are more likely to have the resources and appear less likely to be impacted by childcare responsibilities, are the most likely group to be able to participate. Whilst women fell-runners do have somewhat higher cultural capital than other women runners, the effect is smaller than for men. Possibly this is because gendered differences in family roles and control over time erode the ability of women to head off into the hills for the weekend, whatever the prestige of their occupation. In this case, for women, geography – proximity to hills and mountains – may be a more important determinant of participation in fell-running than it is for men. This hypothesis would require further research to evaluate.

The evidence I have surveyed so far suggests that issues around identity, taste, access and social norms all play important roles in shaping gender differences within running. But we also noted at the start of this section that a key axis of difference between male and female running involvement is that which opposes competitive and self-management orientations. In the next section I turn specifically to look at how this difference might help shed further light on the gendering of running practice.

### **9.7.2 Embodying fitness through running**

In chapter six I contrasted the gendered ways my interviewees framed their biographical narratives of engagement in running and in sport more generally. Whilst the men I spoke to tended to describe their journeys into and through running in terms of sporting achievements, most of the women foregrounded a concern with body shape and weight – particularly when discussing why they took up the sport. This observation fits with others' findings around the centrality of body-image to feminine identities and life narratives (e.g. Throsby, 2016; Broom and Dixon, 2008). The fact that many men expressed motivations around weight management in my survey, yet sporting biographical framings dominated the interviews, seems to chime with other research suggesting that

men are 'simultaneously incited to work on and transform their bodies into culturally recognizable ideals, while at the same time remaining distant and aloof to the size, shape, and appearance of their bodies' (Norman, 2011: 430; see also Beagan and Saunders, 2005). For male runners, it seems possible that sporting narratives of competition, achievement and exploit offer a readily available and gender appropriate cultural repertoire through which other less 'gender appropriate' bodily management motives can be obfuscated.

Connected to this, I also discussed how the notion of 'fitness' appeared to take on distinctive masculine and feminine forms, despite the BRS data indicating that achieving fitness was an almost universal goal for runners irrespective of gender (only 1% said this was of no importance to them). Male runners tended to emphasise an interpretation of fitness based on the ability to run far or fast – to *perform* fitness – whereas for female runners, fitness appeared to be more closely related to a slim, toned look – the *aesthetic* of fitness. In this, my findings build on those of Wright, O'Flynn, and MacDonald (2006: 715), who found that in sport, men 'value... those attributes of the forms of hegemonic masculinity... related to... embodied capacity associated with strength, skill, and power', whereas for 'women, on the other hand, fitness and... exercise were intrinsically linked with maintaining a 'healthy' weight and/or slim body shape.' Other studies too, have suggested aspects of this dichotomy, for instance Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick (2015: 1221), who found that the appeal of yoga to a group of women related to the fact that 'the body techniques [involved] did not emphasise sporting prowess but provided for an integration of body and mind' (also, see Plaza et al. 2017; Lentillon, 2009). And indeed, the female runners in my survey reported stronger motivations around psychological/emotional as well as corporeal maintenance.

Whether it serves to help men to obfuscate 'feminine' self-management motivations that are shared by all runners or not, it is easy to see why the competition for distinction in performative fitness might help drive up the appeal of more extreme forms of running amongst men. Running further than other people or over more demanding terrain provides a route to distinction in

performative fitness in ways completing a local 10k road race or parkrun does not.

It was notable that the women I interviewed who prioritised performative forms of fitness almost all described, in various ways, an awareness of being active in a masculinised culture or of 'doing masculinity'. They described themselves as macho because of their desire to win, talked about micro-hostilities from men they had beaten, described how course cut-off times seemed to be based on average male performances, or described their clubs as dominated by male members. Some discussed how they negotiated this masculinised environment, for instance by knowing how to 'get on with the boys', or proving they were just as good as the male runners they trained with. Perceptions of having to 'pass' male scrutiny in performative fitness milieus may be another reason why female participation rates are lower in competitive and 'extreme' forms of running.

For women seeking aesthetic fitness, there is no need to engage in these potentially problematic or uncomfortable gender performances or social settings. For it is not the performance of running that they value, but the body it helps to shape. And this can be achieved much more conveniently, cheaply and unproblematically on a treadmill or at the local park than atop lonely mountains or in gruelling ultra-distance races. For many women then, the exploits and feats of 'extreme' forms of running that carry high status as performances of fitness may not only be more challenging to access than they are for men, they may also provide no special incentive in terms of the aesthetic fitness goals that a large majority of women appear to prioritise.

### **9.7.3 Summarising gender's role structuring running**

Every individual has their own unique set of motivations and tastes, with men and women engaged in every form of running I studied. What my data shows though, is that taken together, men's choices around running are much more structured by capital holdings, and are much more likely to include 'extreme' forms and feats than are women's. Over the course of this section, I have tried, drawing on the evidence of the BRS, my interviews and on wider research, to make sense of these facts.

We have seen that amongst the male BRS respondents, whilst performative fitness is often central, the type of running an individual engages in tends to vary depending on their holdings of cultural and economic capital as well as their occupational class. Working-class men, for instance, appear more likely to compete in obstacle course races, which may appeal because of their sociality, lively culture and emphasis on strength, whilst traditional professionals, who may be put off by the same characteristics, make up a relatively small part of the participation base. The opposite is true of fell-running and orienteering. Partly this is likely to be an issue of taste, and partly an issue of access and resources. Forms like fell-running, ultra-marathoning and orienteering present additional barriers to participation, which are only likely to be outweighed if a runner has both the resources and a particularly strong taste for what these kinds of running represent.

The female runners I surveyed showed much less social variation between forms, and in both interviews and survey data, were much more likely than men to emphasise aesthetic fitness as an important motivation. In aesthetic fitness, running is best understood primarily as a means of disciplining the body - burning calories and toning muscles – with specific types of running carrying *relatively* little symbolic value beyond their value as exercise. As such, and with women often having less control over their time and other resources, forms that have high barriers to access – such as fell-running or ultra-marathoning – exhibit significantly lower female participation rates than other, more accessible forms.

The conclusions I have presented here contribute to knowledge about the relationship between gender, sport and the body, providing some robust and unique quantitative insights in a research area that is dominated by qualitative studies (e.g. Nash, 2017; Channon, 2014; Wright, O'Flynn, and MacDonald, 2006). Specifically, by treating running analytically as a microcosm of sub-practices or forms, I have shown in much greater detail than has been achieved before, how different ways of running allow for the performance of quite different gender identities, and contribute to the reproduction of gender differences more widely.

## 9.8 Overall conclusions and final reflections

This thesis has shown how Bourdieu's field analysis tools can be applied to a narrow category of practice to provide a fascinating window on how the social processes and divisions that characterise society can emerge in microcosm in almost every aspect of social life. But it has also shown that even a varied and ostensibly egalitarian social practice such as running cannot encompass all needs, tastes and identities in equal measure. Indeed, I have described how running is a highly classed activity, dominated by privileged, well-educated and well-off people. As such, the themes and meanings I have identified as central to running and to distinctions within the sport have tended to focus on what might be thought of as particularly middle-class concerns.

Running as a sporting field is fundamentally structured by forms of physical capital that have limited obvious value in wider social space. It also appears eminently accessible – it does not have the obvious barriers to entry that enable some leisure activities to act as markers of wealth or power. Yet the sport retains a strong connection to privileged groups and, I have argued, provides them with a means of performing a range of widely transferable and valued characteristics and virtues that can contribute to the misrecognition that helps justify their social positions. It is connected in nebulous ways to a cluster of meanings that carry cultural weight and delineate specific group identities within the middle-class especially. Running can be a way of embodying and laying claim to healthiness, youthfulness, self-sufficiency, authenticity, environmental sensibility, mental toughness, self-entrepreneurialism, individualism, rationalism, competitiveness and self-discipline. It offers a way of 'getting along and getting ahead' (see Marinova, Moon and Kamdar, 2013; Storr, 2017), of simultaneously affirming group identity and personal distinction, as well providing a resource for narrating a satisfying story of selfhood that chimes with contemporary middle-class values.

This study has then, contributed a range of new insights and evidence around running as a set of social practices attuned to specifically middle-class tastes and needs. The large volume of quantitative data has allowed for an unprecedented level of detail in terms of the demographic profiling of different forms and micro-

practices within the sport, and the interviews have both aided the interpretation of patterns in this data and generated new insights around the meanings running can have in individual lives. Compared to previous large-scale studies of running (e.g. Ziegler, 1991; Yair, 1992; Borgers et al., 2015; Spiers et al. 2015), my research provides a much more fine-grained and nuanced understanding of the ways people run and what drives patterns in these practices. And compared to previous deployments of field analysis (e.g. Bourdieu, 2010; Bennett et al. 2009; Warde, 2006; Skille, 2007) it provides a much narrower, more focused application of these techniques that identifies hidden structure *within* rather than *between* accepted categories of practice. I hope that, in a modest way, this thesis adds to the tradition of detailed studies of embodiment, social meaning and identity making in the context of a range of different sporting cultures (e.g. Throsby, 2016; Poulson, 2016; Robinson, 2008; Tulle, 2008; Wacquant, 2004).

### **9.9 The view from the finish line**

I started this thesis by describing my initial concerns about others' perceptions of the validity and seriousness of running as a sociological topic, and in truth, this uncertainty stayed with me for a long time. Unexpectedly though, these doubts have proved a great source of motivation over the course of my research. They drove me to dig deep into running to unearth the tangle of roots that connect it to a range of important sociological topics around subjects like health, gender, politics and power. They forced me to find ways of convincingly articulating running's significance to academic and non-academic audiences alike, in the process convincing myself. And they helped me to focus on the ways in which broad social processes can colonise even our simplest actions, underpinning almost everything we do and say in our daily lives.

Indeed, the breadth of this project – both methodologically and in terms of the subject matter addressed – has been both a challenge and a pleasure throughout the research process. It has been a challenge because of the sheer volume of data I have analysed from multiple sources, including: Almost 150 data points from each of over 2,600 survey respondents in the Big Running Survey data; a 150,000 respondent dataset from the Active People Survey; and interview transcripts adding up to almost a quarter of a million words. Doing this amount



of data any kind of justice and identifying overarching themes that summarise the huge variation they encompass has been difficult at times. I have had to exclude a number of interesting statistical findings and relationships, as well as qualitative themes, simply to avoid spreading my findings chapters too thin. The breadth of the topics covered in the thesis has also meant dealing with subjects that could potentially fill an entire PhD in just a few pages. I have had to be selective. Finding the balance between breadth and depth has been a constant consideration.

On the other hand, being able to explore and draw on ideas from such a wide range of researchers and writers has been one of the great joys of this project and has meant that at no time have I felt stale or demotivated. It has also suggested exciting directions for future research focused on specific areas I was only able to treat relatively briefly here. In this regard, field analysis applied to a single practice can perform a kind of trail finding function, mapping out the broad features of a hidden social terrain and identifying potentially fruitful pathways for further exploration.

In truth, the broad, exploratory nature of this research was driven by and reflects my personality, interests and wider working life, which have always ranged widely despite my best intentions to settle on a single specialism! And this is but one of the ways my own biography, biases and perspectives have shaped this research. Some of these biases have become apparent to me as I have gone along, for instance, noticing options I failed to include in my survey because of a lack of knowledge about certain practices, or a tendency to focus on competition in my early interviews. I corrected for these observations when possible and have tried to account for my biases in interpreting the data, but of course my conclusions remain products of my own social position – my own habitus – and unavoidably so.

Writing this thesis has definitely been the metaphorical ‘marathon rather than a sprint’. In fact, a gruelling ultra-marathon would probably be more apt. Like running a long-distance race, writing a PhD can be a solitary experience, with occasional and fleeting contact with fellow travellers, some of whom seem exhausted and ready to quit, whilst others radiate an energising enthusiasm.

Self-discipline, endurance and a modicum of mental toughness have been required along the way, but from here at the finish line, I can honestly say it has been a rewarding experience. As one of likely a very small and select group of readers, my hope is that the next time you see a runner struggling and sweating down the pavement or through the park you will see that her grimace reflects striving for more than a few pounds of weight loss or a better cholesterol score. She is running to signify her place in society; to define the kind of person she is and who she is not; to undergird her sense of selfhood and agency; and to assert her physical, mental and moral virtue. Whilst some runners (such as the highly competitive, fell-running women I interviewed) can be seen as challenging conventional gender, class or age identities, running, for the most part, reflects and reproduces the status quo rather than resisting or challenging it. Despite the rhetoric of authenticity and escape that surrounds the sport, it is thus largely a practice through which social norms are validated and maintained, and one through which middle-class privilege can be justified.

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## **Appendix A: Glossary of running terms**

Not all of the forms of running discussed will be known to everyone, especially non-runners. therefore, I have provided a brief outline of each of the forms below.

### **Road racing (up to marathon distance)**

Road races are the most popular form of running race, taking place on roads normally closed to traffic. Many road races are open to anyone, irrespective of standard or club membership. Most large towns and cities will host several road races per year, mostly over distances from 5km to marathon (42.2km). The most famous road races such as the London Marathon and Great North Run attract tens of thousands of runners and live TV coverage. Most registration fees cost between £5 for a small, local event and £50 for a large, high profile race.

The BRS dataset contains five categories of road race based on distance. They are under 5km, 5km-10km, 10.1km-21km, half marathon and marathon. These are represented in the figures and tables included in this thesis as <5kRoad, 5-10kRoad, 10-21kRoad, HM, and Marathon unless otherwise indicated.

### **Track racing (sprints, middle- and long-distance)**

Track racing covers all forms of race that take place at an athletics track. These races are normally organised by and for athletics club members as part of inter-club league competitions and annual championships. There is a hierarchical structure of competition, with the pinnacle being the national Amateur Athletics Association Championships. Races take place over the outdoor athletics season, which runs from spring until autumn. Indoor track competitions take place during the winter.

Included in the BRS dataset are three forms of track race, sprints (100m-400m), middle-distance (800m-1,500m) and long-distance (3,000m-10,000m). These are represented in the figures and tables included in this thesis as SprintTRACK, MiddleTRACK and LongTRACK unless otherwise indicated.

### **Ultra**

Ultra races comprise all races of over marathon distance (42.2km). They can take place on road or trail, across mountains or (if you are willing to travel) across deserts or through jungles. Popular distances include 50 miles, 100km and 100 miles, although many can be much longer. One of the longest major UK ultra marathon is The Spine Race, a non-stop 268mile race along the Pennine Way in winter. Ultras normally attract very small fields compared to road races – sometimes just a few dozen highly trained runners.

This is represented as Ultra in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Fell-racing**



'Fell' is a dialect word for an area of high land, a hill or mountain used in northern England and Scotland. Fell-running then, simply means hill or mountain-running. Traditional fell-races often do not follow a specific course or path, but rather involve reaching a marker or checkpoint (for example a mountain summit) in the quickest possible time, with competitors choosing their own routes (sometimes researching or recceing a route in advance). As a result fell-running can be dangerous, and requires specialist skills and knowledge to travel over the terrain quickly. Some races, however, do follow prescribed routes and paths, although purists might argue this is trail- rather than fell-racing. Fell-races take place in rugged and 'wild' countryside, with hotbeds in the north of England (especially the Lake District, from whence fell-running originates), and the mountains of Scotland and Wales. Races may be any length from a few kilometres to ultra-distance. Entry fees for races generally range from £5 to £25.

This is represented as Fell in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Trail racing**

Trail races take place off-road, often through rural landscapes or parkland, but may follow routes through difficult rough or mountainous terrain. As the name suggests, races involve running on paths or marked routes. Races vary in length from a few kilometres to ultra-distance, and range from accessible runs around a park to gruelling mountain ultra races. Registration fees vary widely.

This is represented as Trail in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Adventure racing**

Adventure races offer participants an opportunity to race long distances across 'wild' terrain, often split into legs of running interspersed with other sorts of racing such as mountain biking or kayaking. Adventure races often require reasonable navigation skills, and involve travelling between a series of checkpoints. Some races involve reaching as many checkpoints as possible within a set time; others are straight races to the finish. Races can last an hour or two, or be broken up over two or more days. Entry fees range from around £30 for a short event to several hundred pounds for a multi-day race.

This is represented as Adventure in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Obstacle course and Mud racing**

Obstacle course races (OCRs) and mud races are modern takes on traditional military obstacle courses. Obstacles are set along a course usually ranging from 5-10km, although some races are significantly longer. The obstacles involve climbing, zip lines, getting wet and muddy, and the threat of scary looking (but ultimately harmless) hazards involving squirting fire and electric shocks. OCRs have become very popular over the last few years and are organised by several fast growing national and international events companies. Although many participants take part competitively some race organisers prefer to encourage

camaraderie and teamwork. Entry fees are usually over £50 and can be close to £100.

These events are represented as OCR and Mud in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Parkrun**

Parkruns are 5km 'timed runs' that take place in parks throughout the UK every Saturday morning. They are free to enter and staffed by volunteers. Entrants can download a barcode from parkrun's website which enables their time and finishing position to be recorded and published online. There are over 400 weekly events in the UK, with participation exceeding 50,000 people.

This is represented as Parkrun in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Triathlon, duathlon, Ironman**

Triathlon races include swimming, cycling and running legs, the running portion of which is normally 5km (sprint), 10km (Olympic) or 42.2km (Ironman) in length. Duathlon include only running and cycling. Running portions of these races normally take place on roads, being similar in format to a standard road race. Entry fees range from around £70 for most UK races to £300 or more for some overseas events.

These events are represented as Triathlon in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

### **Orienteering**

Orienteering combines running with navigation skills in a race to visit a series of checkpoints (controls) as quickly as possible. Competitors use a special orienteering map and compass to find controls and plot their route as they go, taking account of terrain and obstacles to reach their goal as efficiently as possible. Events normally take place in rural environments, but urban orienteering events exist too. Entry fees range from about £5 to £20.

This is represented as Orienteering or Ori in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

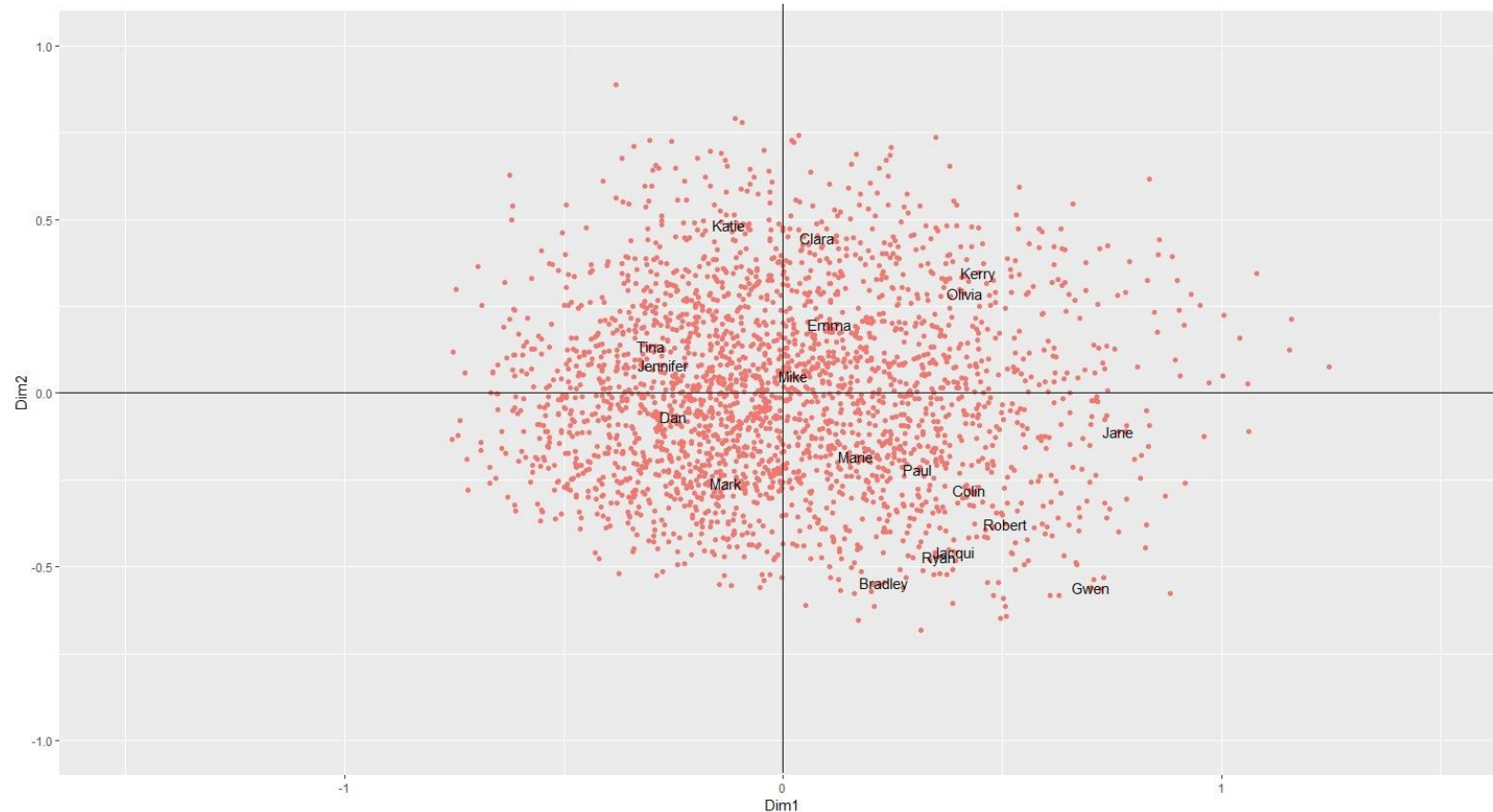
### **Joggers**

This category is used to capture all those runners who never participate in organised races or events.

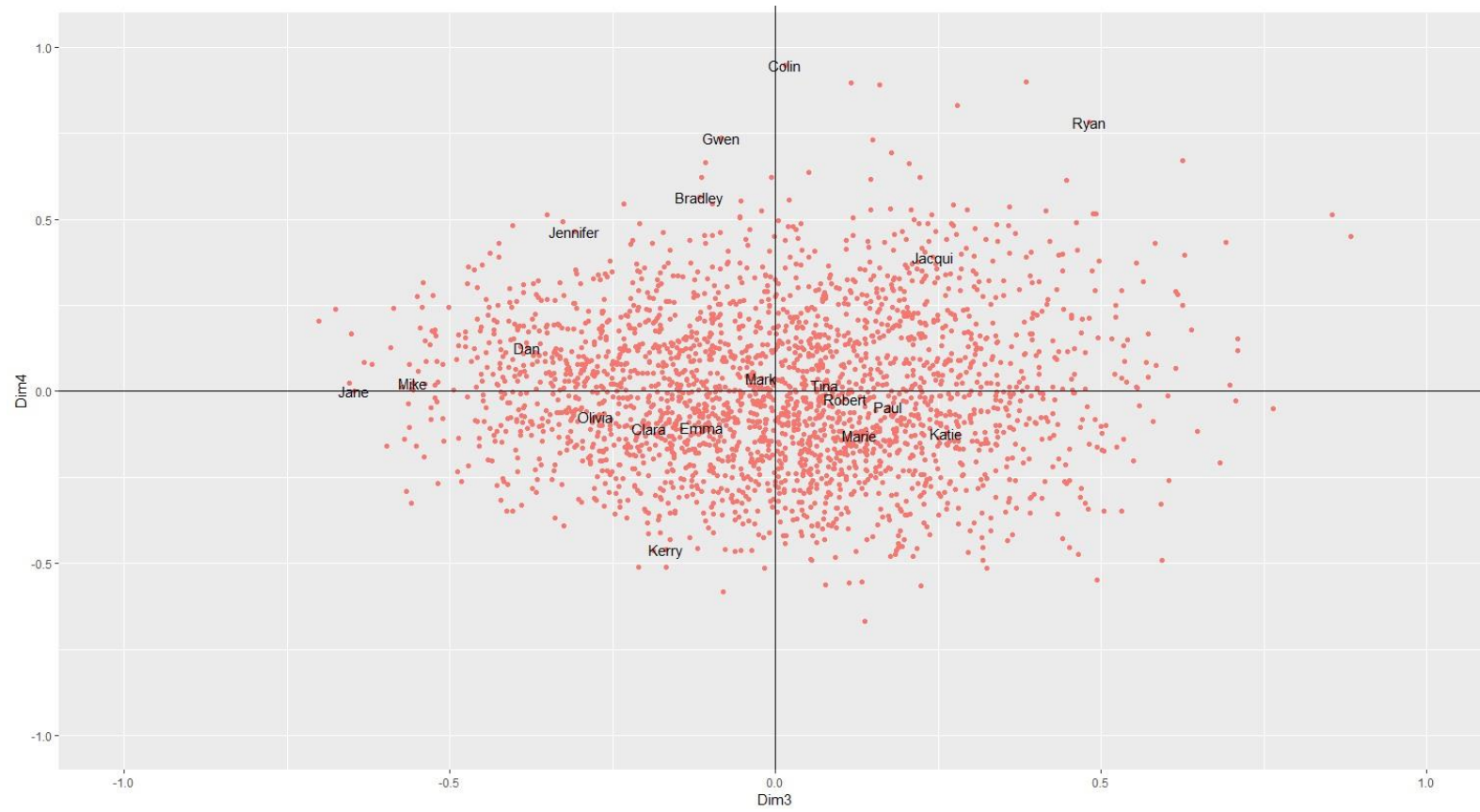
This is represented as Jogging in the figures and tables included in this thesis.

## Appendix B: Clouds of individuals

The multiple correspondence analysis that is the central quantitative analytical tool of this study allows for the production of 'clouds of individuals', which situate individual survey respondents in the social space defined by the MCA dimensions. Below are displayed two such clouds. The first one shows the locations of individuals relative to dimensions 1 and 2, and the second locates individuals in relation to dimensions 3 and 4. These can, therefore be mapped directly onto the maps of characteristics shown in figures 5 and 6. The names displayed on the below plots indicate the positions of the interviewees quoted throughout this thesis.



**Cloud of individuals – dimensions 1 and 2**



**Cloud of individuals – dimensions 3 and 4**

## Appendix C: Survey questions and response formats

### Big Running Survey

Thank you very much for taking part in the Big Running Survey.

Please rest assured that your responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially.

The survey will take just a few minutes to complete. We encourage you to please answer all of the questions, but if you do not wish to provide an answer to a particular question you can simply leave it blank and move on.

Please do not use the back button in your browser. If you wish to go back to change an answer please use the back button at the bottom of each page of the survey.

Contact: Neil Baxter ([n.t.baxter@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:n.t.baxter@warwick.ac.uk))

### Your Reasons for Running and Sporting Background

---

#### What motivates you to run?

For each of the reasons listed below, please select how important they are to you.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Not important	Quite important	Very important
To give me purpose and goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To explore the outside environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To improve my appearance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To escape my worries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To have time to think	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To spend time outdoors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To achieve the best possible times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To improve my psychological well-being	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To meet and socialise with other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To raise money for good causes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not important	Quite important	Very important
To have great experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To improve my fitness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To learn about myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To feel good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To keep myself looking or feeling young	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To feel part of a wider community of runners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To help overcome injury, illness or disability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To do well in races	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To challenge and test myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To lose or maintain weight	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Are there any reasons not listed above that are important to you?**

**Thinking about your school days, which of the following statements best sums up your memories of taking part in sport?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- I was enthusiastic about sport
- I sometimes enjoyed sport
- Most of the time I did not enjoy sport

**Again thinking about your school days, which of the following best sums up your experience of running?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- I was a talented runner
- I was a pretty good runner
- I was an average runner

- I wasn't good at running

**If you participate regularly in any other sports please list them below.**

## Your Running Habits

**On average, roughly how many times per week do you run?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Less than once
- Once or twice
- Three or four times
- Five to seven times
- More than seven times

**In the last year how often have you...**

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Never	Occasionally	Regularly
Run on urban streets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Timed a training run to see if you can get a new best time (i.e. not in a race)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Followed a diet to lose weight?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run at a race track?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had an injury that stopped you running for more than a week?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helped to organise a running club or race?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used weight training or bodyweight exercises to improve your running performance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run on a treadmill?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Never	Occasionally	Regularly
Had personal running coaching?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eaten a special diet to improve your performance?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trained another runner?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Represented a running club or team in a race?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been in charge of organising a running club or race?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bought running magazines?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Had sports massage?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visited running related websites?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been asked to give others running advice informally?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Socialised with running partners outside of running?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used a heart rate monitor whilst running?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bought books about running?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used sports nutrition (e.g. energy bars, gels, drinks)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used a GPS watch or app whilst running?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kept to a structured training programme?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Studied the latest training techniques and advice?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Never	Occasionally	Regularly
Won a running medal or trophy (other than simply for participation)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used websites or apps to record running routes and times?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helped as a volunteer at a running club or event?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Run in the countryside?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visited a physiotherapist for running related treatment?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**How often do you train...**

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Never	Occasionally	Often	Always
Alone?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With a training partner?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With an informal group?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With a club or team?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Which of the following statements best describes the people you run with?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- My running partners are always of the same gender as me
- My running partners are usually of the same gender as me
- My usual running partners include a fairly even mix of both men and women
- My running partners are usually of the opposite gender to me
- My running partners are always of the opposite gender to me
- I only train alone

- Other:

**Which (if any) of the following prevent you from running as much as you would like?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Work
- Looking after your children
- Looking after relatives, friends or others (other than your children)
- Study
- Injuries, illness or disability
- Looking after the home
- Socialising
- Religious observance
- Other sporting activities
- Other hobbies and interests
- Financial cost
- Weather
- Other:

**If you would like to provide details of how your answers to the previous question impact your ability to participate in running, please do so below.**

**Roughly how much money have you spent on running in the last 12 months?**

including race registration, travel to races, kit, club fees, physio etc.

*Mark only one oval.*

- Less than £100
- £101 to £250
- £251 to £500
- £501 to £1000

- More than £1000

*Skip to question 13.*

## Racing

**How many times have you participated in an organised race in the last 12 months?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Not at all
- Once
- Two or three times
- Four to six times
- Seven to twelve times
- Thirteen to twenty times
- More than twenty times

**For each of the following types of race please select whether you have competed in the last 12 months, have not but intend to, or have not and do not intend to.**

This question refers to formal, organised races, not informal races with friends/training partners or to training sessions.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	I have participated in the last 12 months	I have NOT participated in the last 12 months, but intend to in the future	I have NOT participated in the last 12 months and am NOT planning to compete in future
Track race (sprint)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Track race (middle distance)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Track race (long distance)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Road race - up to 5km	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Road race - over 5km and up to 10 km	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I have participated in the last 12 months	I have NOT participated in the last 12 months, but intend to in the future	I have NOT participated in the last 12 months and am NOT planning to compete in future
Road race - over 10km, under 21.1km	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Half marathon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marathon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ultramarathon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mixed terrain / trail race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mountain / fell race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adventure race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Obstacle course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mud race or similar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parkrun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ironman, triathlon or duathlon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Orienteering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**If you have participated in any other kind of race or event not mentioned above please give details below.**

**Do you publish your race performances or personal bests on a blog or record keeping website (for example, powerof10)?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often

**Starting running**

**Which of these statements best describes you?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- I have been a runner without a break since childhood *Skip to question 20.*
- I raced or trained when I was younger, then took a break before starting running again later in life *Skip to question 18.*
- I started running regularly only as an adult *Skip to question 18.*
- Other:  *Skip to question 18.*

*Skip to question 20.*

### Starting or re-starting running in adulthood

**How old were you when you started or restarted running as an adult?**

**Why did you start running as an adult?**

*Skip to question 20.*

### Running bodies

**How much natural talent would you say you have as a runner?**

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I have no natural talent for running	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I am naturally very talented as a runner
--------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--

**Right now, how closely do you feel your body matches up to an ideal shape for running?**

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My body is far from an ideal shape for running	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My body is very close to an ideal shape for running
--	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	---

**How satisfied are you with your body's current appearance?**

*Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very dissatisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very satisfied
-------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	----------------

**Please select any of the items below that you would use to describe your body type**

*Check all that apply.*

- Tall
- Short
- Skinny
- Slim
- Average build
- Athletic
- Muscular
- Solid
- Overweight
- Carrying a few extra pounds
- Plump
- Small
- Large
- Wiry
- Powerful
- Lean
- Heavy
- Other:

**If you regard yourself as having a disability, please provide details below.**

### Your Background

In this last section we just need to collect some information about your personal circumstances to help us understand the ways in which people's backgrounds influence how they participate in running.

**How old are you?**

**What is your gender?**

Mark only one oval.

- Male
- Female
- Other identification

**Do you currently live with a partner/spouse?**

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

**Where do you live?**

Check all that apply.

- England
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales
- Other:

**How would you describe your ethnic group?**

You can expand or specify your response in the subsequent question if you wish

Mark only one oval.

- Arab
- Asian / Asian British
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Chinese
- White British
- White other
- Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
- Other:

**Ethnicity - supplemental**

If you wish to give further details or refine your answer to the above question please do so below.

### Employment status

Mark only one oval.

- Employee
- Self-employed
- Retired
- Student
- Not currently in work
- Other:

**When working, what is/was your usual job? Please provide a job title and a few words of description.**

**Which (if any) of the following responsibilities did/do you have in your usual job?**

Check all that apply.

- Supervision of other people's work
- Management of up to 4 people
- Management of more than 4 people
- Senior leadership or partner
- Business owner
- I was/am self-employed
- Other:

**How many hours per week do you do paid work?**

Mark only one oval.

- none
- 1 - 16 hours
- 17 - 32 hours
- 33 - 40 hours



- 41 - 48 hours
- 49 - 56 hours
- over 56 hours

**What is the highest educational qualification you have achieved?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- None
- GCSE / O-level
- A-Level / Scottish Highers
- Degree
- Postgraduate qualification
- Other:

**If you have responsibility for any children who live with you, how old is the youngest?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- No children
- Youngest child is under 2 years old
- Youngest child is 2 - 4 years old
- Youngest child is 5 - 10 years old
- Youngest child is 11 - 18 years old
- Youngest child is over 18 years old

**What is your PERSONAL annual income before tax?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- £0 - £13,000
- £13,001 - £18,000
- £18,001 - £25,000
- £25,001 - £37,000
- £37,001 - £49,000
- Over £49,000

**What is your HOUSEHOLD annual income before tax?**

Please estimate if you are unsure.

*Mark only one oval.*

- £0 - £14,000
- £14,001 - £24,000
- £24,001 - £36,000
- £36,001 - £56,000
- £56,001 - £75,000
- £75,001 - £98,000
- Over £98,000
- Don't know

**Your feedback**

Thank you very much for your responses. Before submitting your survey, please let us know if you had trouble responding to any of the questions.

**Did you find any of the questions in this survey difficult to answer or unclear? if so, which ones and why?**

**How did you find out about this survey?**

**If you would like to receive a copy of the survey's findings once they have been finalised please provide your email address below.**

Your address will only be used for communication about this survey, and will not be passed on to any 3rd parties or used for marketing purposes.

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## **Appendix D: Interview schedule**

[used flexibly and as an aide memoir during interviews]

Key topics to be addressed:

- Running and everyday life – how running fits into or is limited by other priorities, and how this has changed in the light of aging, life changes and events
- Motivations for running – both initiating participation and ongoing
- Defining moments and experiences (which are prioritised as key or important)
- ‘Taste’ in running – which forms appeal, which do not – and why
- Running community involvement
- Running as a ‘bioethical’ practice – in what ways and why is running used as a tool for disciplining the body?

### **Introduction**

[after info sheet]

I’m conducting a research project looking at the reasons people run, the place of running in people’s lives, and the way runners’ relationships with the sport vary throughout their lives.

During this interview I’m interested to hear about your thoughts, feelings and experiences around running.

I’m going to ask you some questions about different aspects of your involvement in running. Please give as full and detailed answers as possible.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

[sign consent form]

### **Questions (sequence contingent on responses)**

To get us started, please could you tell me as much as possible about your running?

Prompt: what kind of running you do, who you run with, when you started, whether you ran as a child, what you enjoy about it?

To start us off, please could you take me through your life history as a runner?

At what age did you start running?

What made you start running? [probe: yes, but why running *in particular*? - if not addressed]

Are these still the reasons you run today, or have they changed over time?

What memories do you have of running in childhood?

Is there anything you are particularly proud of relating to your running?

What are the particular personal characteristics or attributes that are helpful to have as a runner?

Do you participate in running events?

If so: what sort of events, and what particularly attracts you to them?

On a typical run, how do you choose the routes you take? And what makes a good route?

Could you tell me about the people you run with? (Or do you tend to run on your own?) what influences these choices?

Do you think your gender has influenced your experience of running?

GPS, Garmin, Strava, websites? – and what do you get from them?

How do you find fitting running in with other priorities in your life?

(with reference to previous answer) Have changes in your circumstances changed the way you participate in running over the years?

Talk a little bit about the impact of running on your body shape – how you feel about it? whether it's important to you?

Running in the future?

How would you feel and respond if you had to give up running? What – if anything – would you feel you were losing?

AFTER THIS, MORE POINTED QUESTIONS

Do you think more people should be encouraged to run? If so, what would be the benefits?

Would you be interested in participating in other forms (track, fell, road, mud/obstacle, jogging – if couldn't race)? If not, what puts you off?

Any other questions to zero in on any areas not covered or addressed fully in the previous responses.