Identity Challenges & Identity Work: Sporting Embodiment & Disrupted Identity

To consider

- Theoretical framework of identity work
- The research projects
- Our findings re identification:
  - Materialistic
  - Associative
  - Vocabularic
- Conclusion

Theoretical framework

- Draws upon identity work formulations of:
    - ...the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept. So defined, identity work may involve a number of complementary activities:
      - a) arrangement of physical settings or props;
      - b) cosmetic face-work or the arrangement of personal appearance;
      - c) selective association with other individuals and groups;
      - d) verbal constructions and assertion of personal identities.

Perinbanayagam (2000) reformulates these categories as:

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<th>Snow &amp; Anderson</th>
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All above forms of identity work utilised to sustain our identities as runners (in waiting)

The Research Project

- 2-year collaborative autoethnography of running injuries / rehabilitation; with autophenomenographic elements
- Systematic, almost daily data collection via:
  - detailed field notes
  - training-logs (individual & joint, ‘analytic log’)
  - recordings via digi-recorder
  - photos
- Thematic data analysis
- Log 1 – John; Log 2 - Jacquelyn;
- Log 3 – Joint analytic log (reﬂections, conversations, divergences of experience, etc)

Autoethnography / autophenomenography

- Autoethnographic focus is on ethnós (social group sharing a common (sub)culture) or cultural ‘place’; researcher qua member of this social group
- Autophenomenography* too is autobiographical genre but focus is on structures of particular phenomenon or phenomena as experienced by researcher
- Use of epoché / bracketing – best efforts (sociological version thereof)

**Materialistic identification**

- During extended period of injury & rehabilitation, physical settings used
  - E.g. adherence to same geographical routes (primarily local parkland) for rehab walking & other exercises - previously training runs
  - Practically / functionally, walking/exercising on softer, grassy surfaces helped protect knee joints from impact of road or pavement walking.
  - Symbolically, continuing to tread some of our favoured running routes represented committed position:
    - to training 'space' - geographical & temporal
    - to 'restitution narrative' (Arthur Frank) - re full running fitness

**Personal appearance - via bodywork**

I noticed today that it's 4 months since we have run. What's interesting is that neither of us has put on any extra weight, so whilst at the moment we can't run or even jog, we still look like distance runners. That helps because I can still see myself in the mirror and not someone else. I feel that would be even more difficult if I couldn't see my proper self.

- I know I can't run at the moment, I know I'm totally unfit for running, but it looks as if I am still running. That's comforting because objectively I know when I start running again the experience will not be as hard as if I were carrying surplus poundage. More importantly, I feel I am still here. I can see my running self. So because I still look like I can run, the possibility is I will eventually. (Log 2)

**Associative identification**

Via materialistic identification (trainers, Gore-Tex® jackets, tracksters, etc) also recognisable by fellow runners – materialistic-associative identification nexus:

- As the self is dressed, it is simultaneously addressed, for: whenever we clothe ourselves, we dress 'toward' or address some audience whose validating responses are essential to the establishment of our self (Stone, 1977: 100-102)
- Whilst audience responses not essential to our establishment/maintenance of self, re-affirmed our claim to runner identities:
  - Brief but cheering encounter with 'Dave the Rave' this morning...As he came charging up in his usual style, he nodded and called out to J.: "New Nike Pegs?" “Aye,” responded J.: “I might not be able to run, but at least I look like a runner!". “You're on the way back" was the rejoinder. It lifted our spirits. (Log 2)

**Vocabularic identification**

Snow & Anderson's 'verbal constructions and assertion of personal identities' – aka identity talk

We embraced identity of real runner via:

- 'verbal and expressive confirmation of one's acceptance of and attachment to the social identity ... ' (Snow & Anderson, 1995, p. 245)
- Also 'associational distancing' (p. 241) contrasting ourselves vocabularically with less committed, 'fair-weather runners', or 'joggers':
  - Come on now, Collinson, dig in there! When the going gets tough, the tough ... Don't moan and groan. You don't want to be an old ... out-of-condition jogger, do you now?! (Log 1)
Another form of identity talk - enlivened redux of rehabilitation – narratives of happenier running past.

- Exp. narratives of endurance & perseverance in face of difficulty (see also Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2015):
  - Today we have been struggling with the repeat 5 minute ‘shuttle runs’, trying to keep our running form, which is difficult because of lack of fitness, and monitoring our knees intently, as they begin to complain when our form goes due to that lack. In between repeats we have been reminiscing about other struggles, like when I decided to try to reduce my asthma medication and eventually managed to come off it completely - even for running - much to my delight. “God, there were times when I thought you were going to pass out with the effort,” says J, “but you always kept going, no matter how tough it got. I reckon you would pass P’ Company (UK parachute forces selection test)” (Log 2)

Summary

- Identity work utilised during 2-yr injury & rehabilitation period to sustain runner identities, via (intertwined):
  - Materialistic – use of physical settings:
  - Associative – association with other runners
  - Vocabularic – identity talk
- Retained personal running identities (meanings we attributed to self)
- Maintained social identities as runners in eyes of fellow-runners
- Re more generalised other - social identities as runners not validated
- No fundamental contestation, however, as personal identities so strong
- Plus self-concept - balance between idealised image as serious runner and ’imputed social identities’ (Snow & Anderson, 1995, p. 240) that significant others attributed, not dissonant

Bibliography


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