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# **Narratives of and from a running-woman's body: feminist phenomenological perspectives on running embodiment**

## **Introduction**

The female sporting body has been studied in myriad ways over the past 25-30 years, including via a range of feminist frameworks (Hall 1996; Markula 2003; Hargreaves 2007). Despite this developing corpus, studies of sport only rarely engage in depth with the 'flesh' (Merleau-Ponty 1969) of the sweating, panting, pulsating, lived female sporting body (Allen-Collinson 2009) and a more corporeally-grounded, phenomenological perspective can enrich our understandings of women's sporting 'bodywork'. Here, I suggest that employing a sociological and feminist phenomenological framework can provide a powerful lens through which to explore narratives of the subjective, richly-textured, lived-body experiences of sport and physical activity. Phenomenology of course offers only one of a multiplicity of avenues to investigate sporting embodiment, and here I offer just a small glimpse of its possibilities. To date, sports studies utilising a phenomenological theoretical framework remain surprisingly under-developed, as Kerry and Armour (2000) highlighted over a decade ago, and which largely remains the case (Allen-Collinson 2009), including in relation to phenomenology's fascinating off-shoot, ethnomethodology (Burke et al. 2008; Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2013). Further, as Fisher (2000) notes, the significance of the interaction between phenomenology and feminism has only relatively recently begun to be explored. It seems timely, therefore, to address this intriguing, potentially productive, but sometimes uneasy nexus, focusing in this instance upon narratives of female running embodiment.

With few exceptions (e.g. Young 1998; Chisholme 2008; Allen-Collinson 2011), there is a relative research lacuna in relation to women's experiences of sporting/exercising embodiment utilising an explicitly phenomenological theoretical framework. Methodologically-speaking too, a phenomenological approach can offer

insightful avenues into accessing female sporting experience. In this article, I link feminist phenomenological theoretical perspectives with sociological phenomenology as methodology, employing what has been termed 'autophenomenography' (Allen-Collinson 2009; Gruppetta 2004) to examine narratives of my own situated experience of female running in 'public' space. First, I begin with a brief portrayal of phenomenology as both theoretical and methodological perspective, for those unfamiliar with its tenets. Two research projects are described. Key themes emergent from the data are then portrayed in relation to narratives of, and from my lived-body experiences surrounding the paradoxes and tensions of inhabiting what is experienced as both a vulnerable and also a powerful running body. I first consider the ways in which feminist existential phenomenology in particular can offer us distinctive insights into women's sporting embodiment.

### **Phenomenology, Feminism, Existentialism**

Founded by the philosopher, Husserl, modern phenomenology now constitutes a wide-ranging, multi-stranded theoretical and methodological approach, which accords primacy to lived experience. Seeking to challenge mind/body dualism and also mind/body/world separation, it examines embodied experiences and aspires to reveal the 'essences' of phenomena, the 'essential', core, structures of an experience. Very different ontological and epistemological positions underlie the many and complex strands of phenomenology (see Allen-Collinson 2009 for a general overview). Existentialist phenomenology, and the *oeuvres* of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have engaged extensive feminist theoretical attention (e.g.; Fisher and Embree 2000; Coy 2009). My focus here is on the ways in which phenomenologically-inspired insights, in combination with feminist theory, might profitably be brought to bear on the study of specific, situated, gendered sporting experiences.

In common with existential phenomenologists, feminist theorists have subjected to trenchant critique the dominance of 'reason' and the systematic denial of the importance of the body in human experience. Criticisms have, however, been levelled at some phenomenologists for paying insufficient analytic attention to 'difference,' including gender, and the social-structural influences and constraints upon individuals. Forms of more 'sociologised' phenomenology, including feminist phenomenology, explicitly recognize the structurally-influenced, historically-specific, and culturally-situated nature of human experience, along with the importance of intersubjectivity and 'intercorporeality'. For, as Weiss (1999) notes, our experience of embodiment is never a private affair, but always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies. Csordas' (2002) concept of 'somatic modes of attention' is apposite in this regard, as it focuses on the 'culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others' (2002, 244). I highlight below some of my corporeal dealings with the presence of other, sometimes threatening and harassing, bodies.

Although departing from Husserlian phenomenology, more sociologised forms of phenomenology interweave insights from other theoretical traditions such as feminism (Young 1998; Butler 2006), and queer studies (Ahmed 2007). Although 'traditional' existential phenomenology has oftentimes been accused of taking as tacit norm the masculine (white) body, Merleau-Ponty's work nevertheless has been adapted and utilised inventively and productively by feminist scholars (e.g. Weiss 1999; Butler 2006; Olkowski 2006). Furthermore, as Kruks (2006, 35) observes, in spite of his sexism, Merleau-Ponty's account of the pre-personal body can help us grasp significant aspects of human existence that span distinctions such as class, race, and gender. With regard to those very differences, also, I argue that Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology, aligned with feminist theory, allows for conceptions of bodies and action as highly situated, socially-related, and interacting from particular structural standpoints.

Existentialist phenomenology offers a 'third way' ontologically- and epistemologically-speaking. It starts not from the assumption of an objective world 'out there', nor from a pure, constituting consciousness, but rather from their dialogical relationship, a perspective I find analytically helpful: world, body, and consciousness are fundamentally intertwined and inter-related. One's own body (*le corps propre*) is the subject of perception, the instrument of human grasp on the world (de Beauvoir 1972). As Mensch (2006, 73) notes, our awareness has a first-person character and is always from a particular point of view, a 'hereness' specific to me. Perception is portrayed as an active, creative receptivity; phenomena are not merely abstract things 'out there,' separate from our experience, but form part of our incarnate subjectivity. We have existential unity with the 'flesh of the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1069), and can experience phenomena at a deeply corporeal, pre-(perhaps ultra-) linguistic level. This is powerfully illustrated for me by Pace's (2009) narrative of her father's death: 'Bodies respond, often before thoughts enter the mind. Narratives materialize, fear pours over flesh, stealing breath and flattening the world. I felt as though I had no language' (411-412).

For the in-depth narrative portrayal of our corporeally-grounded experiences of sport and physical activity, Merleau-Ponty's form of existentialist phenomenology is particularly well-suited, given his interest in embodied consciousness, perception, intentionality, and the ways in which we experience lived spatio-temporality. His work has proved fertile ground for those of us pursuing a phenomenological perspective in sports research. For example, Masciotra *et al.* (2001) provide a detailed phenomenologically-grounded account of spatio-temporal distancing and co-ordination in Karate. Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007) explore the sensory dimension of the sporting body in general, and also focus upon the haptic specifically in relation to running and scuba diving (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2012). The dialectical relationship between 'player-body-subject' and the lived-space of the playing field has been evocatively portrayed in relation to 'the beautiful game' of (male) soccer, and the 'silky touch' aesthetics of star players (Hemphill, 2005).

Researchers examining the mind-body nexus in mind-body practices and physical cultures have also found Merleau-Pontian perspectives an inspiration: Morley (2001) for example, examines yoga practice and breath-control, whilst also drawing comparisons between the practice of yoga and phenomenology itself, and relatedly, the role of the breath is also examined by Allen-Collinson and Owton (2013) in relation to asthma experiences and sporting embodiment.

To illustrate phenomenology's distinctiveness in portraying sporting experience, Kerry and Armour (2000, 3-4) draw upon the example of glycogen depletion or 'hitting the wall' in distance running (a feeling well-known to many a runner), contrasting this with a physiologist's approach, where the latter would most likely focus upon holding constant certain variables whilst manipulating others in order to ascertain whether some distinctive, 'objective' process was occurring. Phenomenologists, however, seek to capture as far as possible the lived meaning of hitting the wall for the participant her/himself: how it actually feels to experience this phenomenon, irrespective of whether 'the wall' exists in any physiological, cellular sense. There is a burgeoning literature, particularly within psychology (Moustakas 1994) and sports psychology (Dale 1996) centred on operationalising phenomenology as a distinctive empirical approach. Within psychology and health-related studies, for example, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is one approach that has been used extensively, although some IPA-based studies do present philosophical problems from the perspective of those adopting a 'stronger' phenomenological approach in terms of engaging in *epochē*, and trying to maintain 'openness' to the phenomenon itself (see Allen-Collinson 2009 for discussions).

Researchers employing some forms of 'empirical phenomenology' (including IPA) have encountered criticism for not themselves participating in the processes under study. Although this need not necessarily be construed as a weakness of forms of phenomenology *per se*, or indeed of any methodological approach, autoethnographic phenomenology or autophenomenography provides one means of addressing such criticism, and generating the rich, textured narratives of first-

person experience central to the phenomenological quest to bring to life and share the felt, lived experience. This approach was used in two separate research projects I describe briefly below: one a collaborative autoethnographic study with a male co-runner and co-researcher (see Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2001, 2008) and one an autophenomenographic study of female running embodiment.

### **The Research Projects**

Congruent with the ethos of feminist phenomenology and the spirit of the autoethnographic and autophenomenographic genres, it seems appropriate here to situate myself regarding my own running biography, in order to contextualize the data and subsequent analysis. A female middle/long-distance runner in my fifties, I have a running biography stretching over 27 years (I was a late entrant to the running field!), which has required sustained commitment to training 6-7 days a week, at times twice daily. Struggling to keep in check chronic knee problems since my mid-30s, and (hopefully) to continue running into a ripe old age, nowadays I restrict myself to running on just 5 days per week. Although falling firmly within the non-élite category, I do remain highly committed, a 'serious runner' in Smith's (1998) categorisation of athletes and runners.

With regard to the collaborative autoethnographic project, some years ago, my male running partner and I both incurred relatively severe knee injuries, and decided systematically to document our injury and rehabilitation processes over the two-year rehab timeframe (see Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2001, 2008). We thus each constructed individual 'injury logs,' while a third 'reflective log' was used to examine the research process *per se*, to interrogate and synthesize emergent analytic themes and also to exchange at times highly divergent views and experiences. Whilst some log entries were quite 'matter of fact' in tone, when time permitted we also sought to draft more evocative narratives to capture and record as vividly as possible our subjective, sensorial, emotionally-charged, and very corporeal lived experiences.

In the second study, an autophenomenographic approach (Allen-Collinson 2011) was utilised to examine my experiences as a middle/long-distance runner, training in public spaces. The autophenomenographic method adhered quite closely to Giorgi's (1985) guidelines for undertaking phenomenological research in general, but using myself as both researcher and participant (the 'auto' element). I documented in detail my engagement with training for middle/long-distance running via a research log maintained for a period of 3 years. This involved drafting notes of training sessions, not only in terms of timings, terrain, forms of training undertaken, weather conditions (as is familiar practice to many runners), but also recording in detail specific, concrete, subjective, and corporeal experiences and feeling states (the 'phenomena' element). The length of entries varies between a few sentences and multiple pages of notes. and again I made efforts to produce extended, more evocative narratives when pressure of time permitted.

Adhering to some of Giorgi's (1985) guidelines, this study included the following elements: i) the collection of concrete descriptions of phenomena from an 'insider' (my) perspective; ii) the adoption of the phenomenological attitude, my efforts to be open to the richness and complexity of phenomena; iii) initial impressionistic readings of the descriptions in order to gain a feel for the whole; iv) in-depth re-reading of these descriptions as part of a lengthy process of data-immersion, to identify themes and sub-themes; v) free imaginative variation, where I searched for the most fundamental meanings of a phenomenon, its 'essential' characteristics, by imaginatively varying elements of the phenomenon to ascertain whether it remained identifiable after such imagined changes. Given the ideographic nature of the research, exploring my own lifeworld, I departed from Giorgi's method with regard to constructing general descriptions applicable to a range of participants.

Commensurate with the phenomenological method, in order to identify and bracket (as far as possible) my own preconceptions and presuppositions about female running in public space, I engaged in *epochē* via two specific bracketing

practices not only at the research design phase but throughout the study: 1) discussions with insiders and non-insiders to the distance-running subculture, both female and male; and 2) reading ethnographic accounts of a range of other sporting and physical activities in order to compare and contrast the key elements of these with my running experience, including the gendered dimensions. Although I would certainly never claim to have achieved full bracketing, these practices greatly assisted in increasing critical self-reflection and identifying certain of my assumptions surrounding the experience of being a running woman in public space.

### **A Running Woman in Public Space: Contradictions and Contraindications**

The following discussion highlights some of the key narratives of experience emergent from both sets of data, relating in this case to my use of 'public' space for training purposes, often as a solo runner. The 'public' is of course not a homogenous body with equal rights of access and participation, not least with regard to gender norms. The social structuring of such space has been subject to extensive analysis. Lefebvre (1977, 341), for example, signals the 'political and strategic' nature of public space. Indeed far from being universally open to all, feminist researchers have examined the ways in which participation in, and use of public space are structured and constrained by gender. The gendering of 'public' space, and in particular the contestation of women's 'right' of access, have been explored in a range of studies, for example, Brooks Gardner's (1980) discussion of men's use of 'street remarks' to underscore women's lack of right to enjoy public space free from harassment, and Wesely and Gaarder's (2004) account of women's negotiation of vulnerability in an urban wilderness park.

The social agency of women should not be underestimated, however. Budgeon (2003) reminds us that it is possible to make new, transformative connections with the body, to live the body in different ways, and to move from experiencing the body as object. Indeed, de Beauvoir (1972) herself signalled the empowering force of outdoor recreation for women, whom she exhorted to battle

against the elements, take risks, and go out for adventure (see also McDermott 2004). Battling the elements, active social and corporeal agency, resistance, and transformative action certainly constitute core elements in my own embodied experience of training for distance running, and are similarly reflected in other accounts of women's physical activity as resistance (e.g. Granskog 2003; Wesely and Gaarder 2004; Cronan and Scott 2008).

In the phenomenological analysis of my data, the paradoxical, shifting and contradictory nature of running in public space emerged as salient. On the one hand I found narratives of negative experience: the dangers of, and bodily vulnerability to harassment (verbal and physical), threat and attack. On the other hand, the positive elements, which for me predominate, include narrative experiences of empowerment, social agency, resistance, bodily power, strength and sensory pleasure. All these elements emerged from data analysis as essential components in the experience of training for distance running, although on any single training outing one element might predominate - my experiences of vulnerability and power are held in a state of tension and flux. Here I have space to portray only a few instances of such lived experience, but I hope to convey a flavour...

### ***The Paradox of the Vulnerable/Powerful Woman in the Running Body***

Running in 'public space' can render women (and also in some contexts of course, men) vulnerable to harassment - verbal and on occasions physical, even serious assault. In my own running biography, on occasion men and teenage boys have lunged at me, some grabbing at various parts of my anatomy; the following field note is unfortunately representative of many analogous occurrences of general, low-level (comparatively-speaking) harassment and indicates my embodied response to one particular sexist 'street remark':

Early afternoon, we were running down the high street... J diverted off to nip into the gents' toilet, so I jogged around whilst waiting for him.

Suddenly felt someone brush against me and comment, quite loudly: 'Fantastic arse, Love!'. Before I have chance to utter a withering rejoinder, he is vanishing off down the pavement, turning around to smile and nod, presumably in what he considers an appreciative fashion. I feel the heat and colour rise to my skin, seeing red is indeed the metaphor, angry red suffuses my body at that instant. The adrenalin surge lightens my aching legs and I resume the run at a bursting sprint - at least for the first few minutes. (Log 2, joint study)

Feagin (1991) argues that the relative anonymity of public space emboldens prejudiced individuals to engage in racist behaviour inconsistent (one would hope) with prevailing social norms, and this similarly applies to sexist attitudes and behaviour exhibited toward women in public. At times, congruent with the above field note, such flagrant sexism engenders deeply embodied, visceral feelings of outrage and anger. In other contexts, however, and on fewer occasions fortunately, the vulnerability of my woman's body in public space is brought home to me as I run warily, eyes and ears on full alert, through narrow alleys, dark streets or even just past pub entrances where lascivious comments erupt from boozey male mouths. Running outdoors (at least when the going is good) makes me feel strong, powerful, honed, dynamic, capable. Analogously, Granskog (2003) found that triathlon provided a social space where women could attain a greater sense of personal empowerment in a society that often discounts female capacities and strengths. I too love the feeling of lived-body empowerment, strength, of putting my body to the test, stretching muscles, sinews and capabilities (increasingly so as age takes its toll!), especially after a hard day at work. The mind/body linkage so fundamental to phenomenology is brought to the fore, as I struggle to gain some bodily balance between long hours of 'mind work', cramped up in a predominantly sedentary job and the all-too-brief escape, the 'rush', charge and challenge of physical activity after the long working day:

Nearly 3 weeks' solid of marking. Legs and arms heavy from it, neck and shoulders rigid, strained, taut to breaking. Eyes red and gritty. It's going to be a hard run tonight, I guess. But, just a few minutes into my stride and the navy-dusk wind is cutting away the work smog, sloughing off the grey skin of the working day. I am being cleansed. I am back. I am back in-body after yet another day of attempted body denial, and enforced focus on the headwork. Quads surge forwards, muscles strong and bulking, pushing against tracksters, abs tighten and flatten against the chill wind as I begin to up the pace... Power surges through me, I feel butch, lean, mean and honed, and very much woman. (Autophenomenography, February 2008)

### ***The Elemental Body-World***

Exercising outdoors—whether in rural or urban locations—as opposed to indoors, can create for me some lived-body vulnerabilities. At times rural isolation seems to hold more danger: distance from people, safety and sources of help, challenging terrain, encounters with animals. But then the urban also harbours a set of specific dangers, especially at night: dark alleys and underpasses, doorways where men can lurk and lunge out, stumbling, groping drunks, gangs of men and youths disgorged from pubs, spanning the width of the street. But being outdoors is an intrinsic part of running for me (indoor treadmill running is a dire last resort): facing all the elements in the open air, battling against vicious wind, stinging hail and pelting rain, sinking in fresh snow (watch those Achilles' tendons!), glistening in high summer sun, melting into dark night, coursing over fields eerie in silvery moonlight, running alongside the heavy beat of flying swans. Following de Beauvoir's (1972) exhortation to women to battle the elements, and commensurate with Merleau-Ponty's (2001) portrayal of the intertwining of body and world, my body as part of the elemental world is a fundamental component of my running narratives:

As I set off in the last rays of April sunshine, down the hill towards the playing fields and river, dark, lowering cloud obscures the hills on the other side of the valley. It looks as though it's going to pour down or snow heavily. Sure enough the temperature is dropping rapidly and an icy wind's edge chills my skin, which chafes against thin cotton tee shirt. Shall I head home for warmer gear now, is there time??... No, but best divert away from the open fields and head towards the scant cover of early spring trees. As I continue, the thin wind is bitter against my slight body, but as my core begins to warm to the labour, a strange sensation comes over me. Like Baked Alaska in reverse: my wind-chilled outer skin is bitterly cold, grey-blue, but it seems as though just a few layers beneath the epidermis, my inner body is glow-warm orange. The strangeness of the feeling preoccupies me so that the discomfort of the cold is forgotten for a while and I can concentrate on a steady even pace. (Autophenomenography, April 2008)

### ***Running Abreast***

Contradictions and paradoxes can also emerge in relation to which running gear to select - for running-purpose but also for self-presentation in public places: snug-fitting, skin tight, streamlined clothing provides greater functionality for my running body, being neat and aerodynamic, but can also attract unwanted attention and comment. My clothing compromise is usually to opt for the streamlined, functional kit but - in certain places and at certain times - to seek anonymity and protection via dark sunglasses and a cap/hat pulled down low; MP3 player and headphones provide a supplementary auditory barrier against lewd street remarks and looks, and can be switched off once I reach the open space of fields and meadows that fringe the city, or when running through darkened streets, which require aural attentiveness. Looser, baggy clothing is too cumbersome and restrictive, flapping in

the breeze, catching against and chafing the body, whilst 'proper' running kit renders me empowered, dynamic, streamlined.

Furthermore, it has taken years, indeed decades, to 'discipline' the fleshy expansiveness of breasts to create a more 'sleek' running form. From a phenomenological perspective, Young (1992) evocatively portrays how a woman's breasts can form the centre of her being-in-the-world, more like fluid than a solid, and in movement being liable to sway, jiggle, bounce, and ripple, even when the movement is small. For many women runners, even those who are not particularly full-breasted, such swaying and bouncing can be intensely uncomfortable, even painful when exacerbated by the action of running. Even now, after decades of (non-surgical) breast reduction via running, I wear two sports bras to avoid the embodied discomfort, the 'dys-appearance' (Leder 1990) of my breasted body (Gimlin 2006):

Oh no, I find I've forgotten to pack the usual two bras in my training bag. Ach well, I'll just have to try running in the 'day' bra. But minutes in to the training run and it's nigh on impossible! Not only is it incredibly uncomfortable, verging on painful, but my whole body feels huge, ungainly, uncoordinated, and very unbalanced. Surprisingly, it's not just my upper body but strangely my quads also feel big and billowy, uncoordinated. The two sports bras combination that I normally wear may be 'unflattering' (for whom??) to 'feminine curves' but their flattening and constricting presence makes me feel 'contained', streamlined and aerodynamic. How bizarre that their lack makes me feel as though I'm not a real runner at all. The house is only 10 minutes into the run, so I decide to make a quick pit stop and effect a speedy change. (Autophenomenography, February 2008)

### ***Sensory Pleasures and Dangers***

The centrality of the sensory dimension of sporting embodiment has been signalled in recent years (Allen-Collinson and Owton 2012; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007;

Sparkes 2009), but only rarely features as the focal point within sports studies. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) for example emphasize the importance of 'listening for hazards' when undertaking running training in public, where roads, parks, and pathways are replete with hazards—some more deliberate than others—generated by traffic, pavement cyclists, pedestrians, and dogs. For me, this awareness of danger can manifest itself not only via the visual and aural, but also at a deeply visceral level, and in quickened, sometimes ragged breathing, elevated pulse rate, a tightening of my abdomen and a hypersensitivity of skin, especially on arms and thighs:

Decided to take the bracken route down the moor to the track, but as I enter the head-height, dense bracken, I feel hemmed in, trapped – I can't see what's around the corner, who might be lurking at the path sides. My breath catches, holds, ears straining for any sound, goose pimples catch the moor breeze, trying to quieten my heart beat so that I can hear... probably just sheep... I have to walk some of the way, the path is too steep, too friable for running, but I'm light and primed for flight as any moorland creature... Hit the open space with relief. (Autophenomenography, July 2008)

In contrast, the sensuous pleasures of running embodiment – when I am not too fatigued to appreciate these – form a key narrative of my running experience. The olfactory dimension, whilst largely neglected in studies of sport generally (Sparkes 2009), does feature strongly in more sensorily-focussed sporting analyses where smells can confirm the self's involvement in the sporting present moment, and also substantiate sporting identity via memory (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007). The smell of fresh-cut grass, for example, evokes in me strong childhood memories of watching cricket or listening to the radio commentary in my family's back garden:

As I head down suburban streets to the river meadows, the warmed sweet scent of cut grass suddenly meets me, taking me back to those long, summer-haze holiday afternoons as a child, with all the family

sitting out in the back garden in deckchairs, cricket on the radio, a tractor busy somewhere in a distant field and the drone of a light aircraft overhead. My memory mind travels, and a long section of the pathway goes missing in my running mind. (Autophenomenography, May 2008)

Other sensory pleasures of the running body in harmony with landscape and 'soundscape' also emerge as salient narratives of embodied experience:

One of those 'in the moment' runs tonight. Glorious sunset down by the river, great rhythm, my strides just eat up the ground. Whole sections of the route have gone missing (recalls an earlier fieldnote from a different place, a different time) as John Bonham's great tree trunk sticks beat out the rhythm. Machine-gun the pace. Perfect rhythm, perfect timing. Flow. Breathing and beat in synchronicity. As aquamarine finale of sunset darkens to indigo, as the dying Pagey riffs fade away, I walk the last few steps down the path to my front door. Fade out. Synchronicity. (Autophenomenography, January 2008)

These then are illustrative of some of the narratives of my lived experience as a running-woman who habitually undertakes her training in the contested and gendered zone of 'public' outdoor space.

## **Reflections**

This article contributes in a small way to the feminist phenomenological research literature, by examining the nexus of structure and agency in sporting embodiment as played out in my particular life-world, that of a female distance runner. Sporting embodiment is a relatively under-researched area within the feminist phenomenological tradition, but one which provides, I would argue, an excellent domain for the application of its theoretical insights. For me, the constraints of

social structure and the potentials of female agency coalesce powerfully in my embodied narratives of outdoor running and are lived out at a deep, individual embodied level in terms of the endlessly negotiated, fluctuating ways of balancing both corporeal and psychological power and vulnerability. Feminist phenomenology offers one way of 'capturing' these tensions and paradoxes, partial though that capture must always inevitably be within the phenomenological spirit. An analysis of the linkages between our subjective, lived-body experiences and our situatedness within social structures, offers a powerful means of investigating female subjectivity and embodiment. In particular, it would seem there is a strong rationale for incorporating feminist-phenomenological perspectives into the pantheon of theoretical and methodological approaches to investigating women's sporting (and other forms of) embodiment. These can generate fresh research insights, grounded in the carnal, 'fleshy,' lived, richly-textured realities of the moving, sweating, sensuous female sporting body, which of course also holds cultural meanings, significances, purposes and interests. This is not of course to advocate feminist phenomenology as the only, or even necessarily the best, way of undertaking qualitative investigation into female sporting embodiment, but to propose it as a potent complementary approach, to widen and deepen the focus of the feminist lens. Linked to the power of sociological and feminist theorisations, including those of 'difference,' phenomenology encourages a re/consideration of the structures of women's sporting and physical activity narratives, whilst taking into account the weight of social-structural (including ideological) location and constraint. Feminist phenomenology can help promote deep reflection upon, analytic insight into, and empathic understanding of how it actually feels to be the woman in the sporting body.

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