R Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Running, Being, and Beijing—An Existential Exploration of a Runner Identity

NOORA JOHANNA RONKAINEN,[1]
MARLEN ELLIOT HARRISON,[2] AND TATIANA V. RYBA[1]

[1]Aarhus University, Department of Public Health, Aarhus, Denmark
[2]University of Tampa, Department of English and Writing, Tampa, Florida, USA

In this research, we explore the negotiation of a conflicted runner identity in a Finnish runner's short-term migration to Beijing, China. We examine the historical and cultural construction of the runner identity and discuss the current discourses that constitute the modern runner subjectivities. From there, we continue with a Heideggerian existential-phenomenological analysis of the "boundary situation" when the project of competitive running is challenged due to environmental and cultural barriers in the migration. Our empirical inquiry is based on the first author's autoethnographic account, written during and shortly after her 10-week stay in Beijing in March–June 2011. Two main themes, the loss of control and isolation, are examined, and an existential interpretation is paired with insight from Buddhist psychology. Finally, we conclude with implications for future research in sport and migration studies as well as practical considerations for the use of autoethnography in psychological research and practice.

Keywords: autoethnography; existentialism; identity; running; Zen Buddhism

Introduction

Transnational migration is a growing contemporary phenomenon (Faist 2004). Though there is a growing body of research on migration in professional sports (Maguire & Falcous 2011), there are few studies exploring nonelite, nonprofessional athletes' migration and their athletic identity negotiations in these experiences. Unlike professional and/or elite athletes who compete in their sport at the national or international level, nonelite/recreational athletes mainly migrate for nonsport related reasons such as work, study, and relationships. In addition to the challenge of cultural adaptation faced by all athletes, the nonelites may have their athletic career challenged due to lack of facilities, teams, and clubs in the host site leaving them unable to pursue the very behaviors which help define such identities.

Amateur sport, or "serious leisure" (Stebbins 1992), has become increasingly popular around the globe and has been identified as the most common social activity for modern Europeans (European Commission 2007). A national exercise survey in the first author's home country, Finland, showed that 24% of the population identify themselves as athletes, either elite or recreational (SLU 2010). As Stebbins (1992) observes, such leisure activities involve a sense of pursuing a career, not unlike a professional athletic career, and the development of a cherished athletic identity. As a consequence, threatened participation

Correspondence: Noora Johanna Ronkainen, MTh, MSc, Aarhus University, Department of Public Health, Dalgas Avenue 4, Aarhus, 8000, Denmark. E-mail: nronkain@sport.au.dk

may raise similar psychological difficulties for both elite athletes and recreational sport participants (Lamont-Mills & Christensen 2006). Although there is a large body of sociological research on nonprofessional athletes, few publications have examined the challenge of transnational migration, specifically or its ramifications for the researching or consulting psychologist. For example, literature examining the lives of runners (e.g., Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2001, 2007, 2008; Chalmers 2006; Ridinger et al. 2012; Smith 1998; Tulle 2007; Yair 1990, 1992) has illustrated the importance of athletic identity and long-term commitment for the subculture members. While career disruptions such as severe injuries have been shown to pose a serious threat to athletic identity and produce a "disruption of self" (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2007), the literature largely omits the conflict inherent in migration and identity. From a sport psychology perspective, Carless and Douglas (2009) posit that in order to understand how a transition affects the athlete, we need to understand the personal meaning in sport as well as the co-occurring transitions. The latter are especially relevant to nonprofessional athletes, whose career transitions rarely occur primarily due to sport reasons.

In this article, we explore a transition experience in a nonelite sport context in order to illuminate the identity of a runner with its numerous competing behavioral, psychological, and spiritual connotations. In understanding identities as processes (Hall 1994) that are contested, (re)constructed, and negotiated in different discursive fields, the following study offers an existential analysis of a Finnish, female, nonelite distance runner's negotiation of her runner identity in a "boundary situation" during a temporary migration to Beijing, China. In existential literature, the boundary situation is conceptualized as an event or an urgent experience which propels the person to an encounter of his/her existential situation in the world (Yalom 1980). These situations can include death, struggling, suffering, or guilt (Jaspers 1951) and have the potential to radically alter the person's life perspective (Yalom 1980). We begin our inquiry with an examination of how the runner identity is constructed in literature. Although the running subculture has evolved during the last century, a phenomenon that we will explore in greater detail below, we suggest that there are common existential dimensions to runner's stories that are shared across different historical and cultural contexts. Through this investigation we illuminate the runner as a complex identity label affected by the phenomenological experience of running as well as discourses of class, politics, location, gender, and modernity. We outline our theoretical and methodological foundations used to frame our empirical work, an analytical autoethnography (Anderson 2006) based on the first author's blog entries during and shortly after her 10-week stay in Beijing, China. In the analysis, we employ Heideggerian insight to examine migration as a breakdown and conclude with future directions, limitations, and some insights that existential psychology and autoethnography may provide to practical consultation work with migrating athletes in individual, team, and career counseling settings.

The Existential Runner in Literature

During the 20th century, running subculture experienced a transformation from the pursuit of a few individuals to a lucrative industry and a highly popular sport (Small 2010). As Guttman (2001) illustrates, the early literature, whether in Braga's *5000* (1924), Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1959), or Glanville's *The Olympian* (1969), constructs runners as lonely and tragic figures who struggle against the hostile society and limits of time, space, and physical decline. Sillitoe's *Colin Smith*, arguably one of the best known fictional runners, creates running as his solitary space, where he has the world just for himself, "with not a soul to make you bad-tempered or tell you what to do"

(p. 11). The experience is exhilarating and brings him a sense of freedom and enjoyable solitude. Yet the positive experience of solitude has a possibility to transform to loneliness: ". . . it's sometimes when I stand there feeling like the last man in the world that I don't feel so good. I feel like the last man in the world because I think that all those three hundred sleepers behind me are dead" (p. 9).

Although possibly emotionally affected, the modern, typically middle-class (Smith 2000) runner can hardly find him/herself in these earlier images of the lonely, counter-normative, othered, and exceptionally physically capable individual. Murakami's (2008) ordinary runner (a category that did not exist for Sillitoe in the end of 1950s) may train alone but is also part of an enormous discourse community (Borg 2003) that shares goals and purposes and communicates them in their cultural practices and in the media. The popularity of running is exemplified in the United States where more than half a million people reported having completed at least one marathon in 2010 alone (Ridinger et al. 2012). The modern runner has arguably lost his/her lonely, inward, and exceptional character. On the contrary, the runner has become the model individual in the society: disciplined, efficient, and in control (Small 2010). The personal best in marathon has become social capital and a little extra credit for the resume. The modern runner wants to make sure others recognize his/her prestigious status as a real/serious runner, distinguished from joggers and exercisers (Smith 1998); this is another feature beyond considerations of Sillitoe's lonely hero that hints to a multiplicity of contemporary runner identity categories.

Something of the solitary experience of a runner is yet preserved. Murakami (2008) suggests that the existential threat of another running competitor is replaced with the aging process; as Guttman also notes, "the metaphoric death that waits for every athlete when he (sic) reaches his peak and begins to decline" (2001, p. 296). Although the personal odyssey lacks the political and dramatic dimensions that were critical to English runner literature before the 1960s (Small 2010), the event is highly interesting from an existential perspective, where *being-toward-death* is considered the most authentic human experience (Heidegger 1927/1962) and a state that reveals our ultimate loneliness (Yalom 1980). As Guttman (2001) asserts, athletes' experiences of physical decline are unlike those of other people: they suffer the event in depth that others do not. Decline of physical appearance is, in the end, socially constructed, while the physical performance is not. Significance of the physical performance is cultural and is highly valued in the contemporary, Western running culture (Smith 1998, 2002), a phenomenon which we will illustrate later in the paper.

Theoretical Framework

Existential Questions in Life and Sports

The reviewed runner literature reveals several central themes of existential philosophy. The fictional runners' reflections of freedom, finiteness, loneliness, and authenticity are significant concerns for existential thinkers such as Kierkegaard (1846/1992), Heidegger (1927/1962), and Sartre (1943/2003). Existentialism cannot be considered a unified perspective but rather a range of philosophies that share a number of key concerns. It emerged in 19th century Europe as the critique of philosophical and scientific systems that focuses on universal and abstract essences instead of concrete human existence (Guignon 2002). It is "a philosophy that emphasises diversity over uniformity, concreteness over abstractness, dilemmas over answers, and subjective truths over grand-encompassing theories" (Cooper 2004, p. 8). Heidegger's notion of human being as *Dasein* (Being-in-the-world)

explicates the inseparability of the person and the context: we cannot understand the person without taking into account the socio-cultural environment. Heidegger (1927/1962) maintains that we are *thrown* into an existence which was not chosen by us and to a large extent is not under our control. In throwness, we always find ourselves as already situated and under the powerful influences of history and culture which shape the ways in which human life is lived, understood, and valued. Yet Heidegger (1927/1962) continues that Dasein understands itself as possibilities. Taking up a project or a possibility means taking a stand on one's being, taking ownership on one's thrown existence. The freedom to choose within different understandings, however, always happens against the background of cultural intelligibility within which we are embedded. Moreover, freedom never comes without responsibility and the necessity of choice: In Sartre's (1943/2003) often cited words, we are "condemned to freedom" (p. 485).

Kierkegaard (1846/1992) and Heidegger (1927/1962) place questions of authenticity, death, subjectivity, and meaning in the center of our being, although they state that most of us tend to dwell in forgetfulness of an average, productive, and superficial life. To reach a deeper and more honest understanding of ourselves and the basic conditions of life, we need to be brought to confrontation with ourselves. Heidegger (1927/1962) asserts that this confrontation takes place in situations of anxiety, when the everyday absorption in and familiarity of the world collapses. In those moments, "the world has the character of completely lacking significance" (p. 231). Anxiety reveals the nothingness in the ground of being and unhomelikeness *(unheimlicheit)* (Heidegger 1962/1927) or "weirdness" of human existence (Zimmerman 1993, p. 244). Yalom (1980) contends that the experience of not-at-homeness moreover reveals the predicament of existential isolation, a notion not supported by all existential thinkers (Cooper 2004). Although unpleasant and frightening, anxiety is the state which brings Dasein the "freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself" (Heidegger 1927/1962, p. 232) and may renew awareness of one's existential possibilities. From an existential psychological perspective, it is grounded in the way we confront these situations that we are either able to grow as a person or retreat and suffer (Yalom 1980).

The potential of existentialism for gleaning additional insights into sporting experiences has been recently acknowledged in sport studies. For example, in sport philosophy there are several existentialist analyses of football that have investigated the game itself (Hemphill 2005; Hughson & Inglis 2002), the role of a substitute player (Ryall 2008), and creativity (Aggerholm et al. 2011) and humor in the game (Aggerholm & Ronglan 2012). Heidegger's notion of authenticity has been also used in an analysis of skydiving (Breivik 2010).

In sport sociology, different phenomenological perspectives, especially Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2001) existentialist phenomenology with its focus upon embodiment, have been used in research on the lived experiences of the sporting body (e.g., Allen-Collinson 2009, 2011; Crossley 2001; Hockey & Allen-Collinson 2007; Kerry & Armour 2000). Allen-Collinson (2011) suggests that existential phenomenology, with its emphasis on situatedness of human experience, forms a strong ground for a sociological form of phenomenology, which "add a powerful additional analytic element . . . in explicitly acknowledging and theorizing the historically specific, social-structural elements of human experience and embodiment" (pp. 303–4).

Within sport psychology as a discipline, the questions of how athletes make sense of their throwness to the specific sport culture, search for alternative understandings of their practice, and question the authenticity of their choices, are largely unexplored areas. However, from an existential perspective, there are several identifiable boundary situations

within athletic careers, such as injuries, overtraining, athletic retirement, and crisis transitions, where those questions may potentially emerge. In this article, we aim to contribute to the development of existential sport psychology and moreover intersect philosophical and cultural perspectives into our empirical inquiry.

Methodology and Methods

The emergence of autoethnography as a research method is usually linked to David Hayano (1979), and it has gained more widespread acceptance within qualitative research communities in the recent decades (e.g., Ellis 2004; Sparkes 2000; Stanley 1993; Van Maanen 1995). Some insights have been developed also in sport sciences (e.g., Sparkes 1996; Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2001, 2008), which do not have as well developed qualitative research practices as some other disciplines (Sparkes 2002). Despite the genre's growing popularity in recent years, autoethnography is often considered a contentious, sometimes "self-indulgent" method (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2008) and consequently encountered with suspicion within dominant approaches in sport scientific disciplines (Holt 2003). Problematizing traditional criteria of scientific inquiry in social sciences, interpretivist, qualitative researchers have proposed alternative criteria of evaluation such as evocation, authenticity, congruence, fidelity, resonance, and aesthetic appeal (Sparkes 2000). Moreover, the personal in autoethnography can be used to understand the social because people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum (Stanley 1993). Exploring personal stories is informative because they also reveal how cultural discourses influence the ways in which people render events meaningful (Carless & Douglas 2009). In the analysis, focus is not primarily on the writer but also on those specific experiences within her/his story that illuminate wider (sub)cultural processes (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2007).

Anderson (2006) suggests dividing the autoethnographic genre into evocative (e.g., Bochner & Ellis 2001) and analytic approaches (e.g., Atkinson et al. 2003; Anderson 2006). The major body of research is conducted within the evocative tradition, which draws from postmodern, feminist theoretical sensibilities and distinguishes itself from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions (Anderson 2006). Within the analytic tradition, Anderson (2006) conceptualizes autoethnography as a form and expansion of analytic and realist ethnography. Specific features of analytic autoethnography are the author's position as a full member in the researched group or setting, the explicit statement of such membership in the research publication, and engagement in improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson 2006).

The focus in our research was on understanding how the runner identity gains and shifts meaning within running subculture and other relevant discursive fields in the face of migration experiences. For this research objective, the analytic method outlined by Anderson (2006) and inspired by sociological phenomenology (Allen-Collinson 2011) provided the best framework. In analytic autoethnography, the researcher engages in the traditional ethnographic agenda in seeking to understand the investigated phenomenon by placing it within social analytic context. In ethnographic traditions, researchers are sometimes invisible in the textual representation; in analytic autoethnography, however, researchers "must textually acknowledge and reflexively assess the ways in which their participation reproduces and/or transforms social understandings and relations" (Anderson 2006, p. 385). As a full member of the research setting, the researcher engages in dialogues with other members and co-creates knowledge of the studied phenomenon with informants beyond the self. In this study, the autoethnographic narrative is used to illuminate the identity project of a runner and how this identification is challenged in the context of transnational

migration offering valuable, pragmatic ramifications in terms of both personal insight and professional, therapeutic practices. For example, in her autoethnography on work-related migration, Wright (2009) reflects that one can "provide some continuity and new identity through the writing" (p. 631), an experience which "may offer new perspectives when working with others who are experiencing periods of upheaval in their lives" (p. 637). The therapeutic benefits of journal writing have been long acknowledged in the field of psychology (Janesick 1999). Autoethnography, in addition to personal benefits, also contributes to development of reflexivity in professional practice.

The second author, a formally trained psychotherapist and compositionist who had also lived in Asia, and the third author, a scholar working at the intersection of sport psychology and cultural studies, are both experienced qualitative researchers and served as "critical friends" (Wolcott 1995). As collaborators, the second and third authors discussed the research throughout the data collection and analysis procedures with the primary author and offered insight when solving methodological and theoretical concerns. During the writing process, the authors held numerous research meetings to critically examine the crossroads of sport, psychology, spirituality, culture, and qualitative research methods. As nonrunners, the second and third authors had an etic position to the studied phenomenon, which enabled them to provide a critical distance and point out the 'taken for granted' assumptions the primary author held about the running culture.

Data Collection

The primary data of the analysis consisted of 26 written entries in the first author's blog (signified throughout this section as FAB), a record of transnational migration between Finland and China that focused specifically on the primary author's challenges as a runner. From these blog posts, 22 were written during the time in China (March–June 2011) and the four others as a reflection in the three following weeks after returning home to Finland. Additional sources that helped shape the current analysis were the first author's reflexive journal notes and ethnographic data collected for other scholarly projects in related fields. This ethnographic data included six recorded interviews with other migrant runners in Beijing, media searches (newspapers, Internet) on running in Beijing, and participant observation in an established group of runners who gather two to three times per week for training.

Data Analysis

The data were coded four months after the last blog entry was written. First, open coding (Strauss 1987) was conducted and raw analytical themes were extracted. Central concepts of existential psychology, such as freedom and limitation, embodiment, anxiety, guilt, and authenticity (Cooper 2004), were informing the process of organizing and connecting the emerging analytical themes, yet we were aware of dangers of using the existential approach as a system of predetermined categories. In later analyses, Yalom's (1980) notion of four existential givens (death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness) was tested as one possible lens to interpret the data but abandoned as a rather mechanistic approach which was not sensitive enough to critically examine the emerging themes. The control theme, however, with its reference to Buddhism, led us to expand our theoretical orientation to postmodern, cultural approaches and Buddhist philosophy, which resonated with all three authors.

Analysis and Discussion

Setting the Scene: Introducing the First Author's Migration Experience

I arrived to Beijing in March 2011, when the spring was about to arrive. Our apartment was located in the Central Business District with heavy traffic, and in the first days my throat was very sore because of the air pollution. It took some days before I found the Chaoyang park where it seemed possible to run. During the first days, I also browsed the Internet to find alternative training facilities such as a swimming hall and a gym. I did not find any useful information. Luckily the park proved to be quite good for running. In my second run in the park, I met two Western men running and joined them. They told me there was a group of runners training together in the park on Saturdays. I saw a mention of this group also in a discussion board in the Beijinger website, and on my second weekend I found them in the park. From then on, I ran with these runners two to three times per week.

My training log from these 10 weeks in China reveals five to seven trainings per week, which is slightly less than usual. Because of the traffic and pollution, I ran very early in the morning (when it was possible). Usually I woke up between 5.30 and 6:00 am for my run. This daily rhythm allowed me to run, but became a slight challenge for my recovery, work, and other activities. After these early wake-ups, I was sometimes too tired for exploring the city or focusing on work. As I reflected back shortly after returning to Finland, "I guess we went out once or twice during our stay. I did not mind, but if I always lived like this, not only 10 weeks, I might feel I am giving up something else. The more committed you are to running, the more you have to negotiate the other things" (excerpt from the first author's blog [again, herein signified as FAB], June 15, 2011).

Main Themes

In the analysis, we identified three major categories: the Beijing lifestyle, running experience, and existential questions. In the last category, which is the main source for our analysis, two dominant themes emerged: control and isolation. These themes are explored in Table 1. Other main themes in this category were choice, free will, meaning versus meaninglessness, and self-awareness. Due to limits of space, in the present analysis we explore only the two main themes, control and isolation.

The concerns of control and isolation emerged as a reaction to the transition, which broke down my daily routines and social relations. This situation is highly interesting in the light of Heidegger's (1927/1962) idea of breakdown, which according to him has a potential to shake us off from our inauthentic everydayness and of revealing the concealed nature of the world around us. Although Heidegger himself did not use the term "breakdown," this notion is widely associated with his work (e.g., Dreyfus 1995; Guignon 1993; Pedersen 2009). Heidegger (1927/1962) used more complex phrasings such as "a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully" (p. 62), arguing that when the nonreflective daily living is interrupted, "then the way lays open for studying the phenomenon which is thus lit up" (Heidegger 1927/1962, p. 102). Before we present the analysis of the main themes, we examine how the notion of breakdown can help us to understand the reflections that emerged.

Table 1
Main themes in the category "existential questions"

Theme	Category	Excerpt
Control	Acceptance	So, accept [things mostly not going the way I plan them] or grasp 'my right' to have it my way?
		I think you can run in quite many cities, if you accept the conditions.
	Loss of autonomy	I can only get to the mountains with people who know how to get there.
		I mean, things mostly do not go the way I plan them, in terms of getting from place to another, running, getting the food I wished . . .
	Obsession	Runners often have quite sentimental (and obsessive and stupid) relationship with their love, meaning the running.
	Stability vs. change	I mostly resist change, no matter whether I assume it is good or bad.
		I think most people hate making choices and changing their lives, or taking the changes that are brought to us.
Isolation	Alienation	. . . the big city feels alienating for me.
		I could not connect with myself or anyone else.
	Knowing	. . . interact with the environment, learn to know it, feel it through movement.
	Loneliness	Lonely, or simply alone for some, might be a suffering. But you can still be there and be fine.
	Otherness	In the city I am a total foreigner.
	Solitude	Part of my running I definitely want to do alone.
	Reconciliation	The connectedness I sometimes feel when running there is something different.

Running Project Revealing Itself

According to Heidegger, in our everyday dealings in the world, our fundamental sense of things is not as objects of perception and knowledge but rather as equipment (1927/1962, p. 95). Equipment is essentially something "in-order-to . . ." (p. 97). Heidegger claims that we are not mainly interested in things and affairs for their inner structure, but rather in terms of their user-value for us. He illuminates this everyday dealing with things with an example of a carpenter using a hammer. The carpenter uses the hammer as equipment in the building project and does not usually reflect on the properties of the object that makes it a hammer. For Heidegger, "this is the way the everyday Dasein always *is*" (p. 96, italics in original). The carpenter uses the hammer for building goods. The runner uses roads, track, running shoes, and oxygen for running.

The project reveals itself, however, when the hammer is missing or broken. Heidegger (1927/1962) illuminates: "*When the assignment has been disturbed*—when something is unusable for some reason—then the assignment becomes explicit" (p. 105, italics in original). The aspects of the project that were previously taken for granted, such as the rationale behind the action and the assumed connections between actions and goals, come under

question. Thus, the disruption of activity may illuminate features and underlying values of the project that have been so obvious but gone unnoticed. The breakdown may enable us to "catch sight of the towards-this itself," where "our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time *what* the missing article was ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*" (p. 105, italics in original).

Heidegger's analysis of a carpenter and a broken hammer provides an interesting insight into a broken running project. As Pronger (1995) exemplifies, "the body is a malleable, useful object in (post)modern culture" (p. 428). To recast Heidegger's metaphor in the sport context, in a competitive running workshop the carpenter is the mind or the self and the equipment are the running body, the running shoes, the heart rate monitor, and the training plan. The workshop produces typically personal records in standardized running distances. The most likely disruption in this workshop is undoubtedly a running injury. In my case, I was physically able to run, but the other tools in my workshop were missing: the routes, the running track, and most importantly, the air to breathe!

The running workshop metaphor illustrates a sharp dualism: as Pronger (2002) exemplifies, in sports culture the equipment approach dominates not only in our use of technology but also in the way we perceive the human body. In this dualistic view on human being, "we ARE our minds and we HAVE our body" (Martinkova 2007, p. 174, emphasis in original). The body can be measured, controlled, and systematically developed to produce the desired results. We rarely come to think who wants these results, why, and what this reveals about our beliefs and values.

In my own broken workshop, the first attempts to restore production were not successful, as illustrated in the following from the first author's autoethnographic narrative (originally written on the first author's blog [FAB]):

- . . . [When running,] I started to feel like I was eating dust and not breathing anymore. (FAB, April 3, 2011)
- I planned to go for a little evening run out in the park yesterday, but fortunately I checked out the air quality index. Hazardous! [. . .] The gym was closed also. (FAB, April 6, 2011)
- So, wake up, check the air quality again, "very unhealthy", feeling disappointed, and then back to sleep . . . (FAB, April 6, 2011)

It was out of my control whether I could run outside, but I was determined to keep training. Consequently, I tried replacing the paths outside with a treadmill in the gym. This workshop did not work for me.

> I tried the treadmill running at the gym, and really hated it. Big time. I could not motivate myself to do the training I had in my program. (FAB, April 6, 2011)

I realized that my previous routines would not work in Beijing. I found no interest on the treadmill, and the conditions outside were unpredictable. I was really anxious. My boyfriend, a competitive martial arts practitioner, had challenges in establishing his training as well. In contrast to my reaction, he was usually in a good mood, relaxed about not finding a training facility right away, and doing his kicks and hits in our living room. He was not obsessed about training programs, right intensities, and training diaries. For him there were other dimensions in the practice, while for me it seemed necessary to put in my miles. My broken running project started to reveal some of its underlying values rooted in endurance running subculture with the emphasis on external standards, control and measurement.

Losing Control

Cultural competence reconsidered:

> In foreign countries, I have found out it might not be so simple to order coffee in a cafeteria, find a bus to get from place to another, to have a working internet, or even find any single person that communicates in any of the 5 languages I know to some degree. (FAB, April 11, 2011)

My first reaction with Beijing was an enormous frustration. I was not competent to even order coffee in a café or buy milk in the supermarket. In this experience of helplessness, I questioned whether I really loved adventures that much after all.

> I had told myself that afternoon, I did not find it a value in itself anymore to find myself in a country where I cannot communicate and doing my little things such as reading a newspaper with coffee was so extremely difficult. (FAB, April 2, 2011)

Running into Inner and Outer Barriers: Identifying Meaning in Narratives

The chaos narrative (Frank 1995), where "the modernist bulwark of remedy, progress, and professionalism cracks to reveal vulnerability, futility, and impotence" (p. 97), was my initial experience of being a runner in Beijing. I thought the situation was awful and did not see how it could be reconciled. Moving to China seemed to be a terrible mistake. When unable to execute my training program and the goal-oriented action fell apart, I realized that the way I ran gained meaning from the logic of control. Suddenly these practices were severely challenged, and especially my marathon project, which typically includes massive training mileage, seemed impossible.

My reaction to the loss of control reveals the cultural ethos of modern sport, which according to Guttman (1978) is characterized by quantification, rationalization, and technology. In this discourse, the body is objectified and treated as a resource that is to be optimized, programmed, and disciplined to serve the subject, the sovereign self (Pronger 2002). The running subculture in particular draws strongly from sport sciences and biomedicine, which "give credibility to running as an activity which can both measure and produce fit bodies" (Abbas 2004, p. 166). In Beijing the programming of the disciplined body failed. In the beginning, my throat was sore and I was sneezing due to poor air quality, which was often reported "very unhealthy" or even "hazardous" during the first two weeks. Neither did our neighborhood, the central business district, appear to be a great place for running. In mainstream road running culture the hegemonic discourse constitutes runners in terms of their competitive abilities, measured by personal records in standardised distances (Chalmers 2006; Ronkainen & Ryba 2012). Competitive endurance running is a charasterically modernist pursuit, with central emphasis on "the ability to easily see and measure improvement, achievements, and progress" (Chalmers 2006, p. 17). Although several critical sociologists have discussed the cultural ethos of road running as alienating and oppressive (Marnham 1980; Rigaeur 2000), Smith (2002) and Chalmers (2006) argue that runners themselves do not experience it that way. They found that runners enjoy these modernist elements of running (Chalmers 2006) and exploit the time as a constructive resource rather than the other way around (Smith 2002). Although my participant experiences and observations confirm these findings, my own conflicting subject positions

became especially visible in Beijing. In the previous summer, my coach had given me a training program with recommended heart rates, paces and distances. I had engaged in the practice, although hesitantly. Luckily, our technology has its weaknesses:

> Running as training has the potential risk of being obsessed with monitoring. Right pace (today you have to do between 5.00-4.30/km), right heart rate (160-170), right distance (15K, from which 3+3 easy), right terrain (not too hard, not too hilly, not too bumpy). When I started (again) using my heart rate monitor last fall, I felt it distracting. Happily, it broke down, and now I am free again. (FAB, May 6, 2011)

In my thrownness (Heidegger 1927/1962) to Western sport culture, my starting point was the worldview I had learned in the interaction with my subculture. When I had become immersed into the cultural practices of running, I had internalized the dominant understanding of running that involved surveillance of the running intensity and distance to provide optimal results in performance. However, the excerpt above reveals my sense of *unhomelikeness* in these practices, uncovered in the reaction to the breakdown of the heart rate monitor. Nonetheless, the more fundamental breakdown of the training routine in Beijing revealed the importance I had given to the "confession of the training plan," the belief in the saving power of doing everything according to the program:

> I do not feel good when not doing my training [. . .] I have thought I do not care so much about the races, but over there, spending time with myself, I became aware I do care quite a lot. The mechanistic approaches in sport that I criticize so much are indeed part of my thinking as well. I have to do my miles, I have to do my fast pace, all the trainings of a schedule. (FAB, June 6, 2011)

Looking for Alternative Understanding: Suffering as Learning Opportunity

Although I was temporarily suffering, from an existential perspective my conflict situation can be read as a positive event. For example Kierkegaard (1844/1980) and Heidegger (1927/1962) viewed crisis as the key to authentic living. Heidegger (1927/1962) asserts that "the Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*" (p. 167, italics in original), which means that we mostly tend to act and think in autopilot: we go around like everyone else, fulfilling tasks, routines, norms and roles we think that others expect from us. Heidegger believed that this attunement, which he characterized as falling, prevented us from properly understanding the structure of our being. In our everydayness, we do not live according to our own deepest concerns but in an inauthentic way, absorbed in the they. The value in breakdown situations lies in the capacity of ripping down our everydayness, which may disclose our own deepest concerns and goals, and help us find out what we really believe in and whether we are acting accordingly.

    After the first two weeks of being confused and feeling sick because of the pollution, I realized that it was possible to do some running most of the days. I was not always able to run my intervals as planned, but easy jogging was usually possible. I started to feel that the problem was not really the restricting Beijing, but rather the values I had internalized from our running culture that have such an overemphasis on controlling, planning and performing. At the time these reflections were arising, I was also immersing myself into Zen Buddhism through reading and practice. Through a discussion in a meditation workshop, I found a different way to perceive the situation:

But, like the Buddhist monk said in the meditation last week, we need to adjust
to the conditions. The conditions in themself are not good or bad. The polluted
air in itself is not bad, but only in the relation to my lungs when I am running.
And, what is bad is my reaction, if I complain instead of accept the condi-
tions. [. . .] Maybe this is another difference to Western thinking. We need to
be always in charge of everything. (FAB, April 13, 2011)

No Self, Nothing to Control? Competing Discourses of Self

The demands of autonomy and being in control as criteria of successful life arise
strongly from Western discourse (Wray 2004). As Pronger (2002) observes, the notion
of sovereignty in Western sport and body culture is grounded in aggressive humanism with
a dualistic view on the person: the ordering of the object body "promises to keep intact the
identity, system, and order of the modern self" (p. 180). What it omits and tries to deny
is impermanence and our inevitable failure to control, which we may only come to realize
in our aging and death. Drawing on the Buddhist philosophy, Pronger contends that the
project of sovereignty is fundamentally produced by a loss of connection. Our sport cul-
ture, in promoting individualism, self-creation and self-control, gains meaning through the
underlying "horror of the loss of the self, entailed in the loss of sovereignty" (Pronger 2002,
p. 180).

When I observed my situation from a Zen Buddhist perspective, an alternative dis-
course that I came to study in China, the running project showed itself in a different light.
Who was this self that was mastering the running and where did the control arise from?
As Muzika (1990) asserts, "the illusion of the self, according to Buddhism, is only arisen
because we do not examine our experiences close enough" (p. 62). From a Zen perspective,
the world is constituted by interconnectedness and change permeates everything (Hagen
2003). Buddhism places great importance in dissolving anxiety through detachment to the
grasping, desiring self. Through unattached awareness, all phenomena reveal themselves as
unsatisfying, empty, and without meaning (Muzika 1990). From the perspective of Buddhist
philosophy, the problem with my running project was grounded in a more general problem
of having a self.

I am not trying to say that my anxiety simply dissolved through finding a new per-
spective from Zen. Our fundamental way of interpreting our experiences is grounded in our
culture and does not change overnight. Rather, the loss of control opened up a wider under-
standing of what my frameworks of interpretation are and how they inform my actions. This
conflict also guided me to find alternative representations and points of resistance. My way
of reacting to uncontrolled situations started to become more accepting, and I understood
that my sufferings were mainly caused by my perception, not outside "evils." I still strove
to develop my athletic skills but also accepted my ultimate lack of control and the shaking
ground of the sovereign self.

Isolation

The second central theme emerging from our analysis was the continuum between isolation
and connection. In contemporary psychology, loneliness is often treated as a problem that
can be solved through treatment. Moreover, acknowledging one's lonely condition can be
frightening since it may be interpreted as weakness or incapability to connect with others
(Rosedale 2007). A radically different approach is presented in existential literature where
isolation is seen as an existential given and thus ever present (Yalom 1980), and actually a

positive state since it is a prerequisite for self-knowledge (Kierkegaard 1843/1983). From an existential perspective, loneliness is not pathology but rather consciousness of one's isolated condition, a motivating force to strive for connection, truth and meaning, and a vital aspect of critical life transitions (Rosedale 2007).

The terms isolation, loneliness and solitude are often used interchangeably, but in order to distinguish the different subjective experiences, we follow Ettema, Derksen and van Leeuwen (2010) in distinguishing loneliness as a negative experience of isolation and solitude as a positive, freely chosen isolation. Finally, Yalom (1980) defines existential isolation as the experience that one is "always and irreconcilable separated from others and ultimately alone in one's own reflective consciousness" (p. 355). The experience is not a lack of something (the other person) but rather awareness of what one fundamentally is (Ettema et al. 2010). In my personal narrative, all these forms of isolation were distinguishable.

The Enjoyable Solitude

> . . . nothing beats the spirit of running when I am doing it alone. . . .
>
> No, I am never bored [when running alone]. There are million things to experience and observe within and outside me, the small nuances become more vivid, and on the other hand "the boredom," just being there, set the creative mind free. (FAB, May 16 & April 26, 2011)

In runner literature, runners are often depicted as solitary people, who prefer their own company over others (Guttman 2001). When living a social student life, I loved running alone. Only after several migrations and losing my old social groups, I have actively sought social running. Especially in China, where the runners were my main social environment, I mostly ran with them when it was possible. Negotiation between solitude and relatedness in running was a challenge, and remained ambiguous:

> Even if I feel that the shared running is great, I still need and miss my own private runs. (FAB, May 22, 2011)

Loneliness and Existential Isolation

> In the city I am a total foreigner, I do not understand the people, their habits, their way of thinking, and their meanings. Some people stare at me, I am the different one, I cannot communicate, I have no way to access their realities. (FAB, April 13, 2011)

My reflections of isolation did not refer to missing my friends and family but rather to not understanding what was happening around me. As Stuewe-Portnoff (1988) asserts, loneliness is essentially about estrangement from meaning. Loneliness is not only missing a person but also the loss of a person who is vital for validating a shared meaning, and a person who validates me as meaningful for him or her. Thus, loneliness is not only about physical separation from people but, as evident in my narrative, "the experience of isolation, disorientation or lostness within a dimensional domain of meaning" (Stuewe-Portnoff 1988, p. 546). Actually, the presence of people made me feel much more lost:

> . . . a huge foreign city is the most lonely place. Not the remote forest, because
> there you can imagine people understand. In the city you realize they don't.
> (FAB, April 11, 2011)

Although the experience of loneliness, as exemplified in my case, can be triggered from a factual separation from the familiar environment and people with shared meanings, some existential writers claim that it reveals a more grounding condition of being human; that is, that everyone is fundamentally alone. According to Yalom (1980), existential isolation is a given of being human and thus ever-present, even if it is often hidden by layers of worldly artifacts, imbued with personal and collective meaning. In a stable environment with familiar objects, routines, and established relationships, the primordial world of vast emptiness and isolation is silenced. Existential isolation can be effectively forgotten and escaped through busy life, achievements, love relationships and intellectualizing (Ettema et al. 2010). Similarly to Heidegger's idea of breakdown as unconcealment, Yalom (1980) asserts that the lonely human condition often reveals itself in a boundary life situation, when the "meanings are wrenched from objects, symbols disintegrate, and one is torn from one's moorings of 'at-homeness'" (p. 358). A column I read about the experience of isolation could have been from my own pen:

> The loneliness cannot be removed. It can only be forgotten. For some people,
> this oblivion can last a lifetime, and they can with good reason be considered
> happy. They go in groups, are social, do networking. I do not want to forget
> loneliness. And I don't want to be social. Being social includes the assumption
> that one knows people. No one knows anyone. The paradox of a social person
> is that in imagining knowing other people, he does not know even himself.
> (Kontio 2011, cited in FAB, July 1, 2011)

The experience of existential isolation is often described in extremely negative valuations, such as absence, emptiness, and nothingness (Ettema et al. 2010). Paradoxically, from an existential perspective, the confrontation with one's lonely human nature is actually a positive situation which can lead to inner growth and result in renewed relatedness with oneself, others and the universe (Sand & Strang 2006). In my experience running proved to be a site of reconnection.

Reconciliation?

> In open spaces it is different. In the park and on the mountain we did encounter
> each other. Yesterday, after my run, a Chinese man came to talk with me at
> the park entrance. We had greeted each other earlier on the path, and now we
> tried to chat, he in Chinese and me in English. Not very successful, but he gave
> his card (he is a park manager there) and asked for my email, and obviously
> wanted to go running together. Another Chinese guy is often joining the expat
> group on Saturdays, he does not speak English either and we communicated
> by smiling last week. But, we did communicate. He still wants to go with this
> runner group, although even the expats who speak Chinese hardly understand
> his southern accent. I would call this something of a global runner culture.
> Maybe the words are not so essential after all. At least, there are experiences in
> running that the words cannot reach. (FAB, April 13, 2011)

My lived experience of relatedness despite the lack of common language made me rethink my ontological condition. Within existentialism, there are different views on the condition: Heidegger (1927/1962), for example, differs from Yalom (1980) in rejecting the notion of existential isolation. For him, Dasein's Being-in-the-world is essentially constituted by "Being-with" (Heidegger 1927/1962, p. 157). Because of this essential constitution of Dasein as Being-with, "its understanding of Being already implies understanding of the Others" (p. 161). In this aspect, Heidegger's thinking actually bears striking similarities to Buddhist philosophy for as Zimmerman (1993) observes, "both Heidegger and Zen tradition maintain that once one is released from the constricted self-understanding associated with dualistic ego-centrism, other people and things no longer appear as radically separated and threatening" (p. 256). Importantly, Heidegger (1927/1962) maintains that understanding the others does not derive from knowledge of them; rather, we share "a primordially existential kind of Being" (p. 161).

In sports research, the dimensions of embodied knowledge and belonging to the world through movement were recently discussed by Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) and Humberstone (2011) in the context of alternative sports. Drawing from nonrepresentational theory (Thrift 2008), Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) portray that some bodily practices, especially as they are conducted in nature, have the potential to increase awareness of the present moment and one's relatedness with the environment. As such practices, alternative sports "may enable some individuals both to resonate better with the world and to realize better a sense of an existential *now*" (p. 1276, italics in original).

For Thorpe and Rinehart (2010), embodied resonance with the world is disrupted in traditional sports: "The very nature of dominant mainstream sports enforces strictures upon participants that are antithetical to the potential freedom and playfulness of an organic arrangement of bodies, space and time" (p. 1276). We may ponder whether I started to reflect more on the connectedness because the structure broke down, or do the freedom and play also manifest in more traditional sports when they are given space? Following Pronger (2002), I would argue that even mainstream sports are grounded in the desire to move and play, although the dominant discourse strongly re-sources the energy toward linear, mechanistic, and individualistic practices. Further investigation of the notion of embodied resonance also within mainstream sport would be needed in order to understand whether and how embodiment and movement are experienced differently between these sport cultures.

Summary

Within existentialism there are different ways of understanding isolation and loneliness. Yalom (1980) represents existential isolation as a fundamental given and thus an ever-present human condition; Heidegger (1927/1962), on the other hand, assumes a primordial connection between people. Even if isolation is understood as a fundamental given, it is suggested that the confrontation with it may lead to inner growth, renewed connectedness and a striving for authenticity and meaning (Ettema et al. 2010). My writing in China referred mainly to factual loneliness (lack of the other who can share meaning with me) but also triggered also contemplation on the fundamental structures of our being: connected or separated? The experience of living in China showed me both sides, the overwhelming disconnection from the world and the joyful connection through running together.

For me, my sports practice was the most important way of feeling at home in a new country where I was more lost than ever before. I understood running and something about the other runners. The role of movement as a site for exploring one's existential structures,

including the experience of isolation, has been long acknowledged in dance/movement therapy (Serlin et al. 2000). We hope that research will expand also in the area of sport and provide consultants working with migrating people more awareness of the significance of sport practices in the adaptation.

Closing Thoughts—Toward a More Authentic Running Experience?

The purpose of this research was to offer an existential analysis of a nonprofessional athlete's identity negotiations in transnational migration to China. Since transnational mobility has expanded in the last decades (Faist 2004), increasing numbers of people experience this transition. Thus, gaining understanding of the transition process and its challenges to identities is of utmost importance for the psychology profession and, in our case, to sports psychology more specifically. This research revealed existential experiences of loss of control and isolation, which posed challenges to the runner's identity, training routines, and overall adaptation to the host culture.

In this migration, my previous running routines were temporarily broken down, and the anxiety I experienced activated a more fundamental existential consideration of the meaning in these practices. The main themes in my narrative were control versus acceptance and isolation versus connection, the tensions which, from a dialectical perspective, are never fully resolved or transcended (Hannush 1997). From an existential perspective, my experience of a crisis is yet considered healthy because conflicts and contradictions "can lead to higher levels of integration, can deepen one's sense of being at home in the world, and, thus, can facilitate human flourishing and growth" (Hannush 1997, p. 11). My sense of isolation was partly reconciled, partly sustained, encountered, and challenged but also accepted. The conflict between my running project and the environmental restrictions oriented me to recognize the cultural logic of running I engage in and my embodied connection with the world.

In the contemporary running culture, a technological approach to the activity is visible in running magazines, heart rate monitors with GPS, running shoes, clothes and in the training methods. However, these things and equipment are not in themselves something evil to be neglected and avoided. It has been illustrated that (some) runners enjoy the modernist elements of running (Smith 2002). Moreover, technology provides ways to develop running gear and to monitor training, which can provide safer running and prevent injuries and overtraining. Rather, Heidegger (1977) suggests that we should be aware of technology as ontological condition where everything and everyone becomes a resource to be used for further ends. This worldview "threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth" (Heidegger 1977, p. 28). Technology is aggressive if it becomes the dominant worldview, which downgrades the alternative ways of understanding and speaking. I continuously experience this in the running club where my running mates have a difficult time in even imagining running without measuring and controlling distances, paces and intensities. Maybe only when the project is disrupted and the illusion of control is shattered, the silenced being itself can have a say.

Writing autoethnography was a new and intimate experience. In trying to understand the experience, I had to involve my whole being, not only the runner but also my beliefs, values, and the relationship that were underlying the choice to move to China. Sometimes I wondered if my story deserved to be told, and what could be learned from it. Writing was an important way to recognize my feelings, and also realize the sources of my inner conflict. The therapeutic value of diary writing in transitory life situations (Wright 2009)

was strongly supported by this research. For psychologists working with athletes, both professional and nonprofessional, it can provide a self-reflective tool which can help in tapping into the questions of identity and meaning when facing transition. Moreover, as Nesti and Sewell (1999) suggest, athletes' diaries can help the psychologist to understand how the broader life concerns affect the athlete's experiences.

Limitations

Although autoethnography explores the personal as a reflection of the social, my experience is only one of the narratives of the foreign runners in Beijing. Within the subculture there are different groups of runners (Smith 1998) and not all might experience migration as a disruption like I did. With the other runners I encountered, I found three major ways to narrate their experience of being a runner in Beijing. Some competitive runners, who had similar structured training programs as I did, saw Beijing as a limitation and a threat to their practices. Others, as I heard and read in discussion boards, had given up running. A third trend with runners I met was the emphasis on the bonding experience though running with other runners. In the group of runners who I met and ran with, there were people who had actually taken up running after moving to China because they had more time, they wanted to try new things in life, and the running group was an important social environment.

Autoethnography might not meet the traditional scientific criterion of generalizability, but we hope that our research has filled the alternative criteria of authenticity, congruence, and resonance as suggested by Sparkes (2000). Since there is a gap in research on nonelite athletes' experience of transnational migration, we hope that our research has provided a small contribution to the athlete career transitions literature.

Future Trajectories

One of the aims of this research was to contribute to the currently underdeveloped field of existential sport psychology. As we have illustrated, existential conceptualizations of boundary situation, thrownness, isolation, and breakdown can help to attain an empathetic understanding of athletes' experiences in transition. Athletes at every level encounter boundary situations in their careers when they lose control such as injuries, burnout, and performance deterioration, even if they "did everything right." These experiences are potential crises, especially for those athletes whose identity and sense of meaning in sport dominantly derive from their performance. Moreover, the experience of loneliness described in this article may be difficult to encounter and accept, "particularly in cultures where the lonely are stigmatized as being weaklings, loners and losers" (McGraw 1995, p. 52). Our overemphasis of the individual builds an idealistic picture of the sovereign athlete, who is solely responsible for his/her success and failure.

Existential psychology provides a different framework, where loneliness is considered as an inevitable ingredient of major life transitions (McGraw 1995). Anxiety and doubt are conditions of being human, which should not be forgotten but rather confronted. Before trying to "prescribe what must be done to deal with a phenomenon" (Nesti 2011, p. 291), the existential psychologist seeks to deeply understand the meaning of these experiences for the athlete. Existential approach accepts and lives with the painful sides of being human and sees the potentials of growing, self-knowledge, and restoring and realigning meaning in the encounter with hardship.

Additionally, we intend this research to serve as a case study for researching and practicing psychologists who wish to consider the autoethnographic approach as both a

means of qualitative data collection and therapeutic tool. Although an online blog was used to record the primary author's narratives, any form of record-keeping as a space for telling, examining, expressing, and interpreting can be useful. As such, we avoid experimental design and embrace ethnographic narrative as a means of exploring processes that potentially aid self-reflection and development at the service of both the client and the practitioner. Though the present research only illuminates a single voice, we marvel at the types of information we may learn from multiple, reflective voices employing the autoethnographic process and hope that our research can inspire lively discussion about the efficacy of such methodological design.

References

Abbas, A 2004, 'The embodiment of class, gender and age through leisure: a realist analysis of long distance running', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 159–75.

Aggerholm, K, Jespersen, E & Tore Ronglan, L 2011, 'Falling for the feint – an existential investigation of a creative performance in high-level football', *Sport, Ethics & Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 343–58.

Aggerholm, K & Tore Ronglan, L 2012, 'Having the last laugh: the value of humor in invasion games', *Sports, Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 336–52.

Allen-Collinson, J 2009, 'Sporting embodiment: sports studies and the (continuing) promise of phenomenology', *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 279–96.

Allen-Collinson, J 2011, 'Feminist phenomenology and the woman in the running body', *Sport, Ethics & Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 287–302.

Allen-Collinson, J & Hockey, J 2001, 'Runners' tales: autoethnography, injury and narrative', *Auto/Biography*, vol. IX, no. 1 & 2, pp. 95–106.

Allen-Collinson, J & Hockey, J 2007, '"Working out" identity: distance runners and the management of disrupted identity', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 381–98.

Allen-Collinson, J & Hockey, J 2008, 'Autoethnography as "valid" methodology? A study of disrupted identity narratives', *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 6, pp. 209–18.

Anderson, L 2006, 'Analytic autoethnography', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 373–95.

Atkinson, PA, Coffey, A & Delamont, S 2003, *Key themes in qualitative research: continuities and change*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Bochner, AP & Ellis, C 2001, *Ethnographically speaking: autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Borg, E 2003, 'Discourse community', *ELT Journal*, vol. 57, pp. 398–400.

Braga, D 1924, *5000*, Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Francaise, Paris.

Breivik, G 2010, 'Being-in-the-void: a Heideggerian analysis of skydiving', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 29–46.

Carless, D & Douglas, K 2009, '"We haven't got a seat on the bus for you" or "all the seats are mine": narratives and career transition in professional golf', *Qualitative Research in Sport & Exercise*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 51–66.

Chalmers, T 2006, 'Emancipation through modernist pursuits: the discipline of running', *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 33, pp. 15–20.

Cooper, M 2004, *Existential therapies*, repr. edn, Sage, London.

Crossley, N 2001, *The social body: habit, identity and desire*, Sage, London.

Dreyfus, HL 1995, *Being-in-the-world: a commentary on Heidegger's being and time, division I*, 6th edn, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Ellis, C 2004, *The ethnographic I: a methodological novel about autoethnography*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Ettema, EJ, Derksen, LD & van Leeuwen, E 2010, 'Existential loneliness and end-of-life care: a systematic review', *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 141–69.

European Commission 2007, *White paper on sport*, COM (2007) 391 final, European Commission, Brussels.

Faist, T 2004, *The volume and dynamics of international migration and transnational social spaces*, reprinted edn, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Frank, AW 1995, *The wounded storyteller*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Glanville, B 1969, *The Olympian*, Secker & Warburg, London.

Guignon, C 1993, 'Authenticity, moral values, and psychotherapy', in C Guignon (ed.), *Cambridge companion to Heidegger*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 215–39.

Guignon, C 2002, *Existentialism. Routledge encyclopedia of philosophy*, viewed 16 December 2012, <http://www.rep.routledge.com>.

Guttmann, A 1978, *From ritual to record: the nature of modern sports*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Guttmann, A 2001, 'The road all runners run', *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 293–8.

Hagen, S 2003, *Buddhism is not what you think: finding freedom beyond beliefs*, HarperCollins, New York.

Hall, S 1994, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in P Williams & L Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 392–403.

Hannush, MJ 2007, 'An existential-dialectical-phenomenological approach to understanding cultural tilts: implications for multicultural research and practice', *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 7–23.

Hayano, D 1979, 'Auto-ethnography: paradigms, problems, and prospects', *Human Organization*, vol. 38, pp. 99–104.

Heidegger, M 1962, *Being and time*, Harper, New York. (Original work published in 1927)

Heidegger, M 1977, *The question concerning technology, and other essays*, Harper Torchbooks, New York.

Hemphill, D 2005, 'Deeper inside the beautiful game', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, vol. XXXII, pp. 105–15.

Hockey, J & Allen-Collinson, J 2007, 'Grasping the phenomenology of sporting bodies', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 115–31.

Holt, NL 2003, 'Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: an autoethnographic writing story', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1–22.

Hughson, J & Inglis, D 2002, 'Inside the beautiful game: towards a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of soccer play', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, vol. XXIX, pp. 1–15.

Humberstone, B 2011, 'Embodiment and social and environmental action in nature-based sport: spiritual spaces', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 495–512.

Janesick, VJ 1999, 'A journal about journal writing as a qualitative research technique: history, issues, and reflections', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 505–24.

Jaspers, K 1951, *Man in the modern age*, E Paul & C Paul (trans.), Routledge, London.

Kerry, D & Armour, K 2000, 'Sport sciences and the promise of phenomenology: philosophy, method, and insight', *Quest*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 1–17.

Kierkegaard, S 1980, *The concept of anxiety: a simple psychologically orienting deliberation on the dogmatic issue of hereditary sin*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. (Original work published in 1844)

Kierkegaard, S 1983, *Fear and trembling; repetition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. (Original work published in 1843)

Kierkegaard, S 1992, *Concluding unscientific postscript to philosophical fragments*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. (Original work published in 1846)

Kontio, T 2011, February 20, 'Syrjähyppyjä yksinäisyyteen', *Helsingin sanomat*, viewed 24 February 2011, <http://www.hs.fi/verkkolehti/sunnuntai/20110220/artikkeli/1135263952487?ref=bs>.

Lamont-Mills, A & Christensen, SA 2006, 'Athletic identity and its relationship to sport participation level', *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, vol. 9, pp. 472–8.

Maguire, JA & Falcous, M 2011, *Sport and migration: borders, boundaries and crossings*, Routledge, London.

Marnham, P 1980, 'Mind control', *The Spectator*, vol. 26, pp. 25–6.

Martinkova, I 2007, 'Dialogue with our body', in H Sheridan, L Howe, & K Thompson (eds.), *Sporting reflections: some philosophical perspectives*, Meyer & Meyer, Oxford, pp. 171–7.

McGraw, JG 1995, 'Loneliness, its nature and forms: an existential perspective', *Man and World (Continental Philosophy Review)*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 43–64.

Merleau-Ponty, M 2001, *Phenomenology of perception*, C Smith (trans.), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. (Original work published in 1945)

Murakami, H 2008, *What I talk about when I talk about running*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Muzika, EG 1990, 'Object relations theory, Buddhism, and the self: synthesis of Eastern and Western approaches', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 59–74.

Nesti, M 2011, 'Phenomenology and sports psychology: back to the things themselves!', *Sport, Ethics & Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 285–96.

Nesti, M & Sewell, D 1999, 'Losing it: the importance of anxiety and mood stability in sport', *Journal of Personal & Interpersonal Loss*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 257–68.

Pedersen, CH 2009, *The concept of action and responsibility in Heidegger's early thought*, Doctoral dissertation, viewed 15 March 2012, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/2135>.

Pronger, B 1995, 'Rendering the body: the implicit lessons of gross anatomy', *Quest*, vol. 47, pp. 427–46.

Pronger, B 2002, *Body fascism: salvation in the technology of physical fitness*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

Ridinger, LL, Funk, DC, Jordan, JS & Kaplanidou, K 2012, 'Marathons for the masses: exploring the role of negotiation-efficacy and involvement on running commitment', *Journal of Leisure Research*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 155–78.

Rigaeur, B 2000, 'Marxist theories', in J Coakley & E Dunning (eds.), *Handbook of sport studies*, Sage, London, pp. 28–47.

Ronkainen, NJ & Ryba, TV 2012, 'That is why I gave in to age my competitive ability, but not my soul! – a spiritual journey in endurance running', *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 10–28.

Rosedale, M 2007, 'Loneliness: an exploration of meaning', *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 201–9.

Ryall, E 2008, 'Being-on-the-bench: an existential analysis of the substitute in sport', *Sport, Ethics & Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 56–70.

Sand, L & Strang, P 2006, 'Existential loneliness in a palliative home care setting', *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, vol. 9, no. 6, pp. 1376–87.

Sartre, J 2003, *Being and nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology*, HE Barnes (trans.), Routledge, London. (Original work published in 1943)

Serlin, IA, Classen, C, Frances, B & Angell, K 2000, 'Symposium: support groups for women with breast cancer: traditional and alternative expressive approaches', *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 123–38.

Sillitoe, A 1959, *The loneliness of the long-distance runner*, Allen, London.

SLU 2010, *Liikuntatutkimus 2009–2010*, viewed 12 January 2012, <http://www.slu.fi/liikuntapolitiikka/liikuntatutkimus2/>.

Small, H 2010, 'The loneliness of the long-distance runner in Browning, Sillitoe, and Murakami', *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 60, no. 2, pp. 129–47.

Smith, G 2002, 'Racing against time? Aspects of the temporal organization of the runner's world', *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 343–62.

Smith, SL 1998, 'Athletes, runners, and joggers: participant-group dynamics in a sport of "individuals"', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 174–92.

Smith, SL 2000, 'British nonelite road running and masculinity: a case of "running repairs"?', *Men & Masculinities*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 187–208.

Sparkes, AC 1996, 'The fatal flaw: a narrative of the fragile body-self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 463–94.

Sparkes, AC 2000, 'Autoethnography and narratives of self: reflections on criteria in action', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 17, pp. 21–43.

Sparkes, AC 2002, *Telling tales in sport and physical activity: a qualitative journey*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL.

Stanley, L 1993, 'On auto/biography in sociology', *Sociology*, vol. 27, pp. 41–52.

Stebbins, R 1992, *Amateurs, professionals, and serious leisure*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal.

Strauss, AL 1987, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, repr. edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Stuewe-Portnoff, G 1988, 'Loneliness: lost in the landscape of meaning', *Journal of Psychology*, vol. 122, no. 6, pp. 545–55.

Thorpe, H & Rinehart, R 2010, 'Alternative sport and affect: non-representational theory examined', *Sport in Society*, vol. 13, no. 8, pp. 1268–91.

Thrift, NJ 2008, *Non-representational theory: space, politics, affect*, Routledge, Milton Park, Abingdon.

Tulle, E 2007, 'Running to run: embodiment, structure and agency amongst veteran elite runners', *Sociology*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 329–46.

Van Maanen, J 1995, 'An end to innocence', in J Van Maanen (ed.), *Representation in ethnography*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 1–36.

Wolcott, HF 1995, *The art of fieldwork*, Sage, London.

Wray, S 2004, 'What constitutes agency and empowerment for women in later life? Toward the development of a culturally sensitive theoretical framework to examine ageing', *The Sociological Review*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 22–38.

Wright, J 2009, 'Autoethnography and therapy - writing on the move', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 623–40.

Yair, G 1990, 'The commitment to long distance running and levels of activity: personal or structural?', *Journal of Leisure Research*, vol. 22, pp. 213–27.

Yair, G 1992, 'What keeps them running? The circle of commitment of long distance runners', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 257–70.

Yalom, ID 1980, *Existential psychotherapy*, Basic Books, New York.

Zimmerman, ME 1993, 'Heidegger, Buddhism, and deep ecology', in C Guignon (ed.), *Cambridge companion to Heidegger*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 240–69.

About the Authors

Noora Johanna Ronkainen is a PhD student at Aarhus University, Denmark. She holds master's degrees in theology and in sport science. Her research interests include spirituality in sports, existential and narrative approaches in sport psychology, and athletic career development and transitions.

Dr. Marlen Elliot Harrison has been teaching language, communication, composition, literature, and social science research writing/methods at universities in Asia, Europe, and North America since 1997. Having published numerous articles and chapters on topics ranging from second language teaching to writing classroom pedagogies, he specializes in writing across the curriculum and multilingual learner writing pedagogies. Currently teaching for University of Tampa as an Assistant Professor in English and Writing, he has also taught at the Language Centre, University of Jyväskylä, Finland; the English department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), USA, where he also completed his PhD in Composition and TESOL; and at Doshisha and St. Andrews Universities in

Japan. With a background in mental health counseling and an MA in Education and Human Development/Counseling from The George Washington University, he is an interdisciplinary instructor–researcher who works at the crossroads of humanities and social sciences to explore how both spoken and written language are shaped by, and help shape, cultures and identities.

Dr. Tatiana V. Ryba is an associate professor at Aarhus University, Denmark, and docent of cultural sport and exercise psychology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her current research focuses on transnational career development, gendered mobile identity, performance, cultural transitions, and adaptation in and through sport.