

**GENDER, EMBODIMENT AND SELF-REGULATION:
SURVEILLANCE IN FEMALE DISTANCE RUNNING SUBCULTURES**

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2013) Hamilton, Ontario (Sociology)

TITLE: Gender, Embodiment and Self-Regulation: Surveillance in Female Distance Running

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White. NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 120

Abstract

This thesis draws on data collected through semi-structured interviews with cross country and track athletes to investigate how female distance runners experience their sport in relation to gender and embodiment. The runners identified gender as affecting their sport by way of shorter distances for women's races, heightened involvement of coaches in corporeal matters such as diet and weight, as well as sex verification policies. Distance running was also specifically identified as a sport that intensifies societal pressures for women to be thin. Grounded in Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies', this thesis explores how dominant discourses on gender and the body are reproduced within the subculture of distance running through surveillance practices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express a sincere thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Phil White, for the guidance and recommendations he provided in the process of completing this thesis. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. James Gillett and Dr. Nancy Bouchier for their helpful feedback and support. I am also very grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this research. Finally, I would like to express a heartfelt thank you to the participants in this study who took the time to share their stories with me.

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AIBA – Amateur International Boxing Association

CIS - Canadian Interuniversity Sport

IAAF – International Association of Athletics Federations

IOC – International Olympic Committee

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Introduction

Sport is an institution that has long reproduced dominant associations between masculinity and physical competence. Sport has not only served as a site for celebrating masculinity, but its history also reveals a long-standing tradition of female exclusion. Historically, females were deemed unfit for physical exertion and were excluded from sporting opportunities. Throughout the Victorian Ages, it was thought that women's bodies were too frail for athletic participation (Hall 2008; Hargreaves 1994; Lenskyj 1986). There was a widespread belief that women should not overly exert themselves and that vigorous activity would impair women's reproductive capabilities (Lenskyj 1986; Morrow & Wamsley 2005). During the Victorian era and beyond, the *female frailty myth* provoked heightened regulation of women, causing them to be excluded from athletic participation (ibid). Over time, however, the myth of female fragility has been challenged and women have slowly won integration into the world of sport. In 1912 the first women's events were introduced at the Olympic Games, and thereafter, more women's Olympic events were introduced throughout the following decades. Today, women compete in the same Olympic events as men with a few exceptions, such as ski jumping, canoeing and some kayaking events (<http://www.olympic.org/sports>).

As women made early gains in some sports, distance running was deemed particularly inappropriate for women due to its substantial requirement for strength, stamina and physical exertion. Running was thought to cause permanent tissue damage in women, as well as interfere with reproductive capability (Mewett 2003). Even when some gentler forms of exercise were approved for women, vigorous exercise was still thought to harm the female reproductive organs. Consequently, women were barred from competitive running until the early twentieth century

(Mewett 2003). At this time, modified running events for women were introduced at track and field competitions, providing women with their first competitive opportunities.

Early running competitions for women were highly regulated and were restricted to shorter, modified events (Mewett 2003). Women were often required to undergo extensive medical evaluations before and after competition, as well as throughout their training (ibid). Additionally, women's training was constrained to ensure that they would not over-exert themselves. Beginning in 1912, women were able to participate in the Olympics in some running events. In 1984 the women's marathon was introduced. Today, women participate in all the same events as men in Olympic athletics, except for the 50 kilometre racewalk, decathlon (which is substituted for the heptathlon) and 110 metre hurdles (which is replaced with 100 metre hurdles).

Although women are now mostly granted entry into the same competitions as men, distance running is a sport in which inequitable gender ideals continue to flourish. For instance, the custom of offering shorter distances for women's events still persists in competitive running. Female runners also tend to be subjected to higher levels of medical surveillance. At the highest levels of competition, sex verification policies continue to discriminate against female athletes who do not appear sufficiently feminine. Female distance runners also experience substantial pressure to be thin within competitive environments.

Foucault's (1975) concept of 'docile bodies' provides a particularly salient approach to understanding gender and corporeal practices in relation to distance running subcultures due to its emphasis on surveillance and self-regulation. Foucault's concept of docile bodies refers to the internalizing of covert disciplinary practices through which individuals become self-regulating. Distance running subcultures emphasize training, nutrition and the balancing of caloric intake

and energy output; things that embody discipline and self-regulation. They also reproduce socially constructed gender ideals through structural and cultural practices. As will be discussed in this thesis, surveillance from coaches, officials and athletes themselves encourage female distance runners to engage in self-regulatory behaviour, and ultimately, helps replicate dominant discourses on gender and the body. In sum, Foucault's work on 'docile bodies' provides a useful framework for examining the structure and subculture of women's distance running.

This thesis examines how female distance runners experience their sport in relation to their gender and their bodies. The proposition interrogated is that gendered practices within the sport continue to operate in ways that assume female physical deficiency. Chapter One provides a literature review and a brief introduction to university distance running in Canada. Because surveillance plays a central role in reproducing dominant discourses on gender and the body, Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies' is reviewed and discussed in relation to distance running subcultures. Chapter Two describes the methodology employed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nineteen female runners competing in cross-country or track at Canadian universities. Chapter Three reports findings on how the subculture of women's distance running promotes dominant ideals mandating thinness for women. Chapter Four examines how the experiences of female runners are affected by gendered practices, such as shorter races, a marked involvement of coaches in corporeal matters, and sex verification testing. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

Gender and Sport

The relationship between gender and sport has received notable attention over the past few decades. Studies have examined how normative gender expectations are produced and reproduced through sport. Sport has been identified as a site that reproduces constructed gender ideals which normalize bipolarity and mutual exclusivity of the sexes (Cavanaugh & Sykes 2006; Kane 1995; Lorber 1993; Messner 2002). It has been further argued that sport is structured in ways that ascribe masculine superiority. Modifications to sports for women and practices such as sex verification testing emphasize difference between the sexes and promote the ideology of male superiority (Kane 1995; Lenskyj 2003; Lorber 1993; Wackwitz 2003).

In her 1993 work “Seeing is Believing: Biology as Ideology”, Lorber argues that sex and gender are socially constructed categories. According to Lorber, two separate genders produce two distinct sexes which are “different and unequal” (1993:1). Lorber explains how organized sport provides insight into the socially constructed nature of sex. She argues that numerous organizational structures mandate bipolarity and mutual exclusivity of the sexes.

Several scholars have discussed how modifications for women’s sporting events construct sex differences (Kane 1995; Lorber 1993; Theberge 2000). For instance, women’s ice hockey forbids contact (Theberge 2000) and male and female figure skaters have different requirements for jumping and dance moves (Lorber 1993). Modifying women’s sporting events is an ongoing practice. In Canadian Interuniversity cross country championship races, women only run five kilometres; half the distance run by men.

According to Kane (1995), modifications for women's sports perpetuate the myth of female physical deficiency by implying that females are incapable of abiding by the same regulations as males. Kane (1995) suggests that modifications for women's sports do not cater to the abilities of female athletes, but instead serve as a tool to perpetuate the ideology of male superiority. Placing athletic performances on a continuum would expose the overlap in ability between the sexes in such a way as to challenge the prevailing gender order (Kane 1995).

Sex Verification Testing

Sex verification testing is a prime example of how sport emphasizes difference between the sexes. Sex verification testing is mandated by international sporting organizations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). While sex verification testing does not happen in CIS cross country or track, the practice nonetheless speaks volumes about how women are seen in these sports. Sex verification testing promotes the ideology of male physical superiority by penalizing female athletic competence and gender nonconformity.

Cavanaugh and Sykes (2006) claim that sex verification testing discriminates against women who do not appear sufficiently feminine. According to Cavanaugh and Sykes (2006), sex testing policies perpetuate the illusion of a biologically based sex/gender binary, despite a lack of medical criteria defining clear boundaries between the sexes. The current sex testing procedures mandated by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) allow athletes to be tested on a case-by-case basis when suspicion is raised concerning the sex of an athlete (IAAF Policy on Gender Verification 2006). In order to avoid raising suspicion about their sex, athletes must present themselves in conventionally

feminine ways (Cavanaugh & Sykes 2006; Wackwitz 2003). Female athletes who develop too much musculature, who excel in their sport, or who do not appear conventionally feminine can be subjected to sex verification testing (Cavanaugh & Sykes 2006; Kane 1995; Wackwitz 2003).

Cavanaugh and Sykes (2006) suggest that sex verification testing serves to police women by ensuring that if they choose to engage in a masculine activity (sport), at least they will respect gender ideals in other ways. Kane (1995) and Wackwitz (2003) argue that sex verification policies operate from the presumption that women who excel in sport are not truly female. By forcing women to undergo sex testing due to rapid improvement or athletic supremacy, such policies perpetuate the ideology of male superiority (Kane 1995; Wackwitz 2003).

Sex verification policies constitute a form of gender discrimination that affects distance runners at the highest levels of competition. While sex verification occurs in a number of sports, it has been particularly prominent in women's track and field, with several notable cases arising in past decades. Although championed as biologically sound measures of femaleness, current sex verification policies employed by the IOC and IAAF are largely premised on socially constructed standards of femaleness. For example, body comportment and other visible cues are often precursory means by which athletes are identified as being in need of testing. Athletes who fail to project a sufficiently feminine appearance may be singled out for testing, especially if they excel in their sport.

The current sex testing policies of the IOC and IAAF stipulate the need to conduct testing when doubt arises concerning the sex of an athlete. According to the IAAF Policy on Gender Verification (2006, Section B), mandatory sex testing is likely to be the result of

- a) challenge by another athlete or team as brought forward to authorities at an athletic event, including the president of the meet, technical delegate [or] medical delegate;
- b) Suspicion raised as to an athlete's gender as witnessed during anti-doping control specimen collection;
- c) An approach made to the IAAF, Regional AAA or National Federation by an athlete's or her representative for advice and clarification.

By allowing a “challenge” to be issued against female athletes who do not appear sufficiently feminine, the IAAF and IOC enforce gender conformity and discriminate against women who do not fit the narrow parameters of what they deem acceptably female. This can clearly be observed in the gender controversy surrounding Caster Semenya. Semenya is a young South African middle distance runner who recently emerged as a top athlete on the international stage. In August 2009, Semenya was asked to undergo sex verification testing by the IAAF during the World Track and Field Championships after winning her preliminary heat of the 800 metre race. The reasons cited for her testing included her deep voice, rapid improvement and dominating performance. Amid the controversy, Semenya went on to win the championship race by 2.45 seconds, fueling further debate between those who claim she possesses an unfair advantage and those who claim she is a victim of racist and sexist feminine standards.

Semenya was sidelined for eleven months while her case was being examined by the IAAF, during which Semenya's athletic potential and earning capacity were severely limited (Imray 2010). Although cleared to compete in July of 2010, Semenya continues to suffer the negative effects of her ordeal. Despite being a world champion, she has been unable to obtain the necessary sponsorship to fund her career (*The Hamilton Spectator* 2010). It is particularly interesting to note that the winner of the 2012 World Championship 800 metre race, Mariya

Savinova, won with a time of 155.87; only .42 seconds slower than Semenya's winning time of 155.45. Savinova was one of Semenya's fellow competitors in 2009 who complained of Semenya's supposed masculine advantage (Dixon 2009). When she beat Semenya in 2012, however, there was no mention of Savinova having a masculine advantage; presumably because Savinova presents herself in a more conventionally feminine way.

Semenya's case provides a poignant example of how sex verification policies serve to monitor the gender expressions of female athletes. Female athletes who fail to conform to the rigid and arbitrary feminine standards established by sporting authorities are severely penalized. They may be removed from competition, have their records nullified, and have their reputations destroyed. In Semenya's case, negative media attention caused her to lose valuable sponsorship opportunities, despite her eventual clearance by the IAAF. These repercussions impose limitations on female athleticism. Sex verification policies allow the best female athletes to be barred from competition on grounds that they possess an 'unfair' advantage. Such policies assume that women who excel in competition cannot truly be female, especially if they lack other markers of conventional femininity. By penalizing their success through sex verification policies, sporting authorities discriminate against female athletes and restrict the progress of women's sport.

The Female Frailty Myth

Lenskyj (1986) identifies *the female frailty myth* as central to the exclusion of women from sporting opportunities. Lenskyj's 1986 work *Out of Bounds: Women Sport and Sexuality* provides a background of women's sport throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, highlighting discriminatory practices that limited female athleticism. In the sports of

track and field and road racing, women faced particularly stringent limitations due to concerns that running would result in permanent tissue damage and impaired reproductive capability (Mewett 2003). Mewett (2003) argues that women gained access to these sports by exhibiting a certain degree of compliance towards rules and practices that limited their opportunities and privileged masculinity. For example, women often ran shorter races than men (Mewett 2003), a practice that continues today in CIS cross country.

Many scholars argue that athletics has traditionally been constructed as a male domain (Fields 2005; Hargreaves 1994; Krane et al 2004; Lenskyj 1986; Messner 1988; Sage 1990). Lenskyj's 1986 work *Out of Bounds: Women Sport and Sexuality* provides a background of women's sport throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, highlighting discriminatory practices that limited female athleticism. Lenskyj identifies *the female frailty myth* as central to the exclusion of women from sporting opportunities. In the sports of track and field and road racing, women faced particularly stringent limitations due to concerns that running would result in permanent tissue damage and impaired reproductive capability (Mewett 2003). Mewett (2003) argues that women gained access to these sports by exhibiting a certain degree of compliance towards rules and practices that limited their opportunities and privileged masculinity. For example, women often ran shorter races than men (Mewett 2003), a practice that continues today in CIS cross country.

In her later work *Out of on the Field: Gender, Sport and Sexuality*, Lenskyj (2003) discusses how women continue to be excluded from many of the opportunities available to male athletes. She notes that female athletes are not granted the same resources allotted to male teams, despite legislative changes mandating gender equality. Female athletes may be granted smaller

budgets, be provided poorer fields and courts to play on, and be provided with smaller coaching staff (Washington & Karen 2001).

Homophobia in Sport

In addition to addressing gender inequality in sport, Lenskyj's (2003) work also addresses the specific problem of homophobia directed towards female athletes. She demonstrates how constructed gender ideals and homophobia work together to marginalize female athletes, especially lesbian and bisexual athletes. Lenskyj (1986) draws attention to the historical connections made between lesbianism and female athleticism. Since sport has been traditionally constructed as a masculine pursuit, and since homosexuality has traditionally been seen as a form of gender inverse behaviour, there is a tendency for sportswomen to be perceived as lesbians (Lenskyj 1986; Plymire & Forman 2000). As Lenskyj explains, female athletes are often stigmatized as 'mannish' and lesbian. This connection between lesbianism and female athleticism has been found to be particularly prevalent in women's contact sports (Lenskyj & Kane 1998).

In their 1998 work, *Media Treatment of Female Athletes: Issues of Gender and Sexuality*, Lenskyj and Kane examine how athletes are affected by homophobia in women's contact sports. They suggest that homophobia in sport may impede the ability of female athletes to bond with each other. While sport has traditionally fostered male bonding, it can also provide a space for female bonding. Lenskyj and Kane (1998) suggest that homophobia in sport deters female bonding and empowerment and thus argue that heterosexual and lesbian athletes alike suffer from homophobia in sport.

In her more recent work, Lenskyj (2003) points to the invisibility of lesbian athletes. Lesbian identities of many female athletes are rendered invisible by the media, by other athletes and by the general population. Lesbians are made invisible by a culture that stigmatizes homosexuality among sportswomen and encourages lesbian athletes to conceal their sexual orientation (Lenskyj 2003). Lenskyj also argues that liberal feminist discourse depoliticizes the relationship between sexuality and sport, thus further reducing the visibility of lesbian athletes. Lenskyj suggests that radical feminist approaches could be productive in combating homophobia in sport and gender inequality more broadly. She claims that a combination of radical feminist and liberal feminist initiatives would be particularly effective in celebrating lesbianism in sport.

While there has been a significant amount of research done on homophobia in women's sport, most of this research has examined contact sports or sports that are deemed to be traditionally masculine. Due to associations between lesbianism and involvement in contact sports, homophobia has been identified as particularly virulent in such sports. Consequently there is a notable lack of research examining homophobia in gender neutral sports, such as distance running. Whereas female athletes involved in contact sports are stereotyped as lesbians (Griffin & Genasci 1990; Russell 2007), women who engage in fitness activities are often stereotyped as heterosexual (Elling & Janssens 2009). Further research is needed in order to understand if homophobia operates differently, depending on the gendered features of the sport in which it appears.

The 'Feminine Apologetic'

There is a widespread perception that athletic activity is an inherently masculine pursuit that ultimately renders females more masculine. Parker and White (2007) argue that women who

perform well in sport, or who engage in male-dominated sports, are especially seen as more masculine. Similarly, Kane and Lenskyj (1998) note that women who are seen as less feminine through their involvement in sport are often subjected to questions about their sexual orientation. Relatedly, women who display masculine behaviour through sport have been reported to participate in the ‘feminine apologetic’, a process whereby women engage in overt displays of heterosexual femininity to compensate for the masculinity they display through athleticism (Broad, 2001; Caudwell, 2003; Krane, Choi, Aimar & Kauer 2004; Parker & White, 2007; Roth & Basow, 2004). Apologetic behaviours can include practices such as downplaying athleticism, minimizing musculature and making a concerted effort to appear conventionally feminine (Davis-Delano, Pollock & Ellworth 2009). The ‘feminine apologetic’ has been identified as tool used by female athletes to avoid negative stereotypes associated with female athleticism, homosexuality and gender deviance more broadly (Broad 2001).

Sports sociologists argue that some sports are organized in ways that encourage apologetic dress (Lenskyj 2003; Roth & Basow 2002; Sage 1990). Roth and Basow (2002) argue that female athletes are often required to wear feminizing uniforms and point to figure skating as an example. Before women’s boxing made its debut at the 2012 Olympic Games, the Amateur International Boxing Association (AIBA) proposed making skirts compulsory for female boxers (Creighton 2011). It was stated that mandatory skirts would enable female boxers to appear more feminine and be distinguishable from male boxers. While Poland adopted this policy and made skirts mandatory for female boxers, the AIBA backed down and decided to make the skirts optional for international competition. The AIBA faced strong opposition from some female boxers and their supporters who claimed that forcing women to wear skirts in competition is sexist. Although the policy was never enacted, the IBA’s attempt to mandate skirts for female

boxers highlights the pressure put on female athletes to engage in feminizing practices and conform to socially constructed gender ideals.

In a 2004 study, Krane and colleagues conducted focus groups with female varsity athletes who described feeling pressure conform to hegemonic feminine ideals. These sessions revealed how many female athletes experience contradictions between athleticism and femininity (Krane et al. 2004). The athletes expressed beliefs that athleticism is inconsistent with feminine ideals and experienced difficulties in simultaneously embracing both a feminine and athletic identity (Krane et al. 2004). However, the study also revealed that some female athletes take pride in their athletic identities, thus reducing the relevance of the ‘feminine apologetic.’

According to Shari Dworkin (2001), conventional ideals pertaining to femininity produce a “glass ceiling” on women’s muscular strength. To conform to conventional feminine ideals, some women shape their athletic training regimens in ways that will prevent them from gaining too much visible muscle. However, due to the qualitative nature of her study and the relatively small, homogeneous sample size, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader female population, especially not to elite athletes.

The ‘feminine apologetic’ may operate differently for female athletes depending on their racial identities. According to Messner (1988), because dominant feminine ideals are predicated upon Eurocentric standards, black athletes may be affected in a slightly different way than white athletes. Roth and Basow (2004) suggest that black female athletes may more apt to embrace an athletic identity than white women since they may not identify with Eurocentric feminine standards. Roth and Basow (2004) also note that because black women have traditionally been

perceived as robust and physically strong, they may be less inclined to engage in apologetic behaviours.

Although black women may respond differently to the feminine apologetic, the theory that they are less affected by it is questionable. Cahn (1994) discusses how black female track and field athletes have endured racist and sexist representations of themselves as masculine and animalistic. Cahn (1994) argues that throughout the twentieth century in the United States, black femininity was constructed by the dominant culture as lacking feminine grace and refinement. The dominant culture emphasized the size and strength of black female athletes, who were constructed as “naturally superior athletes” (Cahn 1994:127). Given the racist and sexist representations of black female athletes that prevailed throughout the twentieth century, it is plausible that some black female athletes felt pressured to appear feminine. Additionally, female athletes can benefit from projecting a conventionally feminine appearance since this can provide them with more sponsorship opportunities, although black athletes still tend to have fewer sponsorship opportunities than white athletes (Carty 2003). It could also be the case that the ‘feminine apologetic’ may not adequately capture the experiences of black women since it is a concept that focuses on femininity without explicit attention to race. More research is needed to understand how the ‘feminine apologetic’ operates depending on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of athletes.

The Sexualization of Female Athletes

Numerous scholars have commented on the ways in which female athletes are subjected to sexual objectification (Hall 2003; Lenskyj 2003; Roth & Basow 2004). Rules, such as those governing volleyball, force female athletes to wear outfits that contribute to their sexual

objectification (Lenskyj 1998; Roth & Basow 2004). Roth & Basow (2004) also argue that the outfits worn by female figure skaters are designed to appeal to a male audience. Robinson (2002) notes that female beach volleyball players are required to wear bathing suits while male players wear knee-length shorts and tank tops. Unlike the uniforms worn by male athletes, those worn by female athletes often reveal much more flesh, thus contributing to their sexualization (Roth & Basow 2004). Many scholars have noted how the sexualization of female athletes detracts attention from performance and directs it towards their bodies, which serves to downplay female athleticism (Carty 2005; Kane & Lenskyj 1998; Roth & Basow 2004).

Scholars argue that female athletes are also sexualized by technologies of media representation (Bruce & Wensing 2003; Duncan 1990; Heywood & Dworkin 2003). Media images of female athletes tend to incorporate non-athletic poses (Bruce & Wensing 2003; Duncan 1990; Duncan & Hasbrook 1988; Heywood & Dworkin 2003). Images of male athletes are also much more prevalent and are of higher quality than those of female athletes. When female athletes do receive media attention, there is a notable tendency to focus on female athletes who present themselves in conventionally attractive ways (Carty 2004; Heywood & Dworkin 2003). According to Duncan and Hasbrook (1988), biased media representation serves to downplay the athleticism of female athletes.

Heywood and Dworkin (2003) identify a tendency for female athletes to capitalize on their sex appeal in order to boost sponsorships. While some claim this trend is detrimental to women's sport, Heywood and Dworkin argue that sexualizing media ploys provide female athletes with a much needed source of income. Moreover, they point out that many female athletes derive a sense of empowerment from the publicity they receive. In their 2003 work *Built to Win: the Female Athletes as a Cultural Icon*, Heywood and Dworkin describe the changes that have taken

place in recent decades with respect to cultural representations of female athletes. They specifically identify a significant growth in the visibility of female athleticism since the late 1990's. Female athletes are increasingly gaining fame and recognition for their athletic accomplishments; however, they continue to lack the same funding opportunities available to male athletes. Consequently, they sometimes participate in sexualizing media ploys to fund their careers. While some claim that sexualized publicity impedes the progress of women's sports, Heywood and Dworkin (2003) argue it can provide female athletes with a much needed source of income in the absence of the funding opportunities available to men.

Carty (2005) argues that while some perceive the integration of sexuality and sport as empowering, the practice of using sex appeal as a marketing ploy is damaging to those who cannot create a conventionally feminine image for themselves (or who do not wish to). Such athletes are often excluded from funding opportunities and placed at a competitive disadvantage.

Sport as a Source of Empowerment

Many scholars have identified sport as a source of empowerment. Sport can provide many benefits, such as good health, an ease of movement with one's body, self-confidence, and a sense of achievement (Lenskyj 1991). Sport can also provide a space to form life-long friendships, provide travel and educational opportunities, and immense pleasure. Furthermore, it has been suggested that sport can help individuals overcome personal difficulties. Leedy's (2009) study of women who were in their thirties and forties and engaged in long-distance road racing mostly at amateur levels revealed that running can provide women with a sense of empowerment and help them cope with personal problems. The runners in her study reported that running provided them with a sense of achievement, mental and physical well-being, social

support and a sense of stability. Although Leedy's study is severely limited by the homogeneity of her research subjects, who were all white and middle class, her study invites further research in the area of sport and empowerment.

Sport and Social Status

Within the broader culture of organized sport there is a hierarchy that defines the cultural value attributed to different sports. At the top of the hierarchy are the sports which are accorded the greatest prestige and economic rewards. Sport sociologist Michael Messner (2002:141) refers to the top of this hierarchy as the 'center of sport'. According to Messner (2002), the center of sport is occupied by sports that are characterized by physical contact and require speed and power. Messner (2002) suggests that football and hockey are the two key sports that occupy the center of sport in North America.

Sports to which males have a biological advantage (such as those requiring speed, height and power) are assigned the greatest value in Western culture (Sage 1990). Messner (2002) asserts that the most central sports are characterized by aggression, speed and power, which are considered masculine qualities. Sports, such as men's football and ice hockey, carry a huge fan base and have billions of dollars invested in them. Conversely, sports that are deemed feminine generally receive much less media attention and spectatorship. They also do not have as much monetary value attached to them.

Messner (2002) argues that while men's sports continue to occupy the center of sport, women's sports are beginning to move closer towards the center. There have been notable gains in women's basketball, with the rise of the WNBA, and also in a number of other sports. However, Messner (2002) argues that while women's sports are being nudged closer towards the

center, hegemonic masculine values, such as competitive individualism, continue to characterize mainstream sport. Messner explains that mainstream sporting culture continues to promote the ideology of male superiority by attributing greater value to men's sports and by valuing hegemonic masculine qualities.

Some suggest that sports tend to be distinguished as either masculine or feminine, depending on a variety of qualities associated with any given sport (Sage 1990). Sports requiring speed, strength and size are associated with masculinity, while sports emphasizing aesthetic qualities tend to be associated with femininity (Sage 1990). Middle distance running is a sport that can be seen as masculine in its emphasis on pain tolerance and feminine in its promotion of bodily reduction.

Because it does not receive a great deal of attention, prestige or material rewards compared to other sports, distance running can be seen as a peripheral sport according to Messner's typology. Distance running also embodies characteristics that are antithetical to hegemonic masculinity, such as its tendency to promote bodily reduction. As such, one may think that distance runners may experience their sport from a somewhat marginal position. Indeed, in his 2002 study on sport and masculinity, cross country coach and sociologist Eric Anderson discusses how male cross country athletes sometimes endure accusations of homosexuality, failed masculinity and even physical assaults. However, these experiences may be the exception, rather than the norm among distance runners. Furthermore, involvement in distance running may elicit very different responses from others, depending on gender. Because distance running is in some ways consistent with feminine ideals, female runners may experience social rewards for their athletic pursuits.

Body Image and Sport

Slim, svelte bodies are highly valued in contemporary Western culture. Idealized images of both men and women emphasize leanness as a marker of health and virtue. The pursuit of leanness has thus become a major imperative in the Western world (Shilling 2003). This is evidenced by the growth of the fitness industry, cosmetic surgeries and booming weight-loss product sales (Brumberg 1997; Gimlin 2009; Shilling 2003). Health promotion campaigns underscore the extent to which the pursuit of health and fitness is also sanctioned by government agencies. On a broad scale, the conditions of high modernity¹ require individuals to assume greater responsibility for their own health. As will be discussed below, health promoting activities have a moral value. The pursuit of health and fitness has become a cultural imperative within contemporary Western society.

Shilling (2003) argues that in high modernity, there is a tendency for individuals to view their bodies as ongoing projects. Self-improvement is approached via diet, athletic training and cosmetic practices. Activities such as running are often pursued as a means to achieve a lean, slim body. Slimness is not only idealized within Western culture, but also associated with moral virtue:

Slenderness represents restraint, moderation and self-control. Our culture considers obesity ‘bad’ and ugly. Fat represents moral failure, the inability to delay gratification, poor impulse control, greed, and self-indulgence (Hesse-Biber 1996:4).

¹ Shilling draws on Giddens’ (1990) concept of *high modernity*, which stipulates that post-modernity has not yet been reached. Instead we are currently living in an era of continued modernity, where the features of modernization are radicalized. Whereas this era is commonly referred as post-modernity, Shilling follows Giddens in embracing the term *high modernity*.

Thinness and obesity are both laden with moral judgement. Thinness is associated with virtue while obesity represents personal failure.

While leanness is in general valued for both men and women, it carries greater weight for women. This is evident in media images of women, for which ideal body weights have become lower in recent times (Davis 2008; Hesse-Biber 1996). Shilling (2003) observes that as women have made social, educational and political gains throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the idealized feminine figure has become progressively smaller. This trend may be connected to a desire to emphasize difference between the sexes, and ultimately, to preserve the existing gender order which ascribes superiority to masculinity. Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007) argues that cultural expectations mandating thinness for women are particularly harsh in the Western world. Women are not only expected to be thin, but women are also judged highly on appearance as opposed to other attributes (Hesse-Biber 1996). With such strong expectations surrounding body weight, many women have adopted a preoccupation with the pursuit of thinness that parallels cult-like behaviour. Obsessive and ritualistic behaviour, which are associated with culthood, are characteristic of women who are preoccupied with weight. Hesse-Biber refers to this preoccupation as “the cult of thinness” (2003:5).

The *cult of thinness* is arguably exaggerated in the sub-culture of women’s distance running. Female runners face both cultural expectations to be thin, as well as performance-based pressures stemming from associations between thinness and competitive success. As a result, there is substantial pressure to be thin among female distance runners.

There is a growing body of research that examines body image dissatisfaction and the prevalence of disordered eating patterns among female athletes (Ferrand, Champely & Filaire

2009). While some studies report that athletes tend to have higher levels of self-esteem and lower rates of eating disorders than non-athletes, other studies indicate the opposite (Swami, Steadman & Tovee 2009). Researchers have speculated that the need to maintain an athletic physique spurs female athletes to develop higher levels of bodily dissatisfaction (ibid).

The prevalence of eating disorders among female athletes may depend on the level of competition in which they are involved (Ferrand et al. 2009). Although regular aerobic activity has been associated with higher levels of self-esteem and bodily satisfaction among women, this may not be the case for female athletes competing in sport at elite levels (Swami et al. 2009). Swami et al. (2009) identify a correlation between level of competitive involvement and body image dissatisfaction among female athletes. Female athletes involved in higher level competition were found to be more likely to develop body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders than those who participate in sport recreationally (Smolak, Murnen & Ruble 2000; Swami et al. 2009). In their 1996 study on runners, Estock and Rudy found that high intensity female runners were more preoccupied with weight compared to those who ran less intensely.

Hasse, Prapavessis and Owens (2002) examine the extent to which athletes display social physique anxiety, disordered eating patterns and perfectionism. They identify a correlation between perfectionism and social physique anxiety, whereby female athletes are more likely than male athletes to set exceptionally high standards and to experience bodily dissatisfaction. Female athletes are at greater risk of developing bodily dissatisfaction and eating disorders than male athletes (Hasse et al. 2002).

Other studies have examined correlations between the type of sport athletes take part in and levels of bodily dissatisfaction. For instance, Swami et al.'s (2009) study reveals higher

levels of bodily dissatisfaction among female track athletes than among female tae kwon do athletes; bodily dissatisfaction is higher among women involved in leanness promoting sports, such as running. Along with figure skating, dancing and gymnastics, distance running is one of the most cited sports in which female athletes for developing eating disorders (Davis 2008).

The emphasis placed on thinness for women in contemporary Western society, coupled with pressures stemming from athletic subcultures can augment the pressures felt by female athletes to be thin (Haase et al. 2002). In sports where performance can be hindered by excess weight, there is additional pressure felt by athletes to be thin (Robinson 2002). Coaches sometimes play a role in encouraging athletes to monitor their weight, which can provide another source of pressure for athletes. Tomlinson (1998) conducted participant observation with an elite track club in the United Kingdom, conducting interviews with female track and field athletes. The study revealed that coaches sometimes engaged in conduct that was perceived as intrusive by some of the athletes, such as asking questions about diet and weight.

While there are numerous studies that support the theory that female athletes are at increased risk for developing eating disorders and bodily dissatisfaction, there is also evidence suggesting that sport provides women with a source of empowerment and bodily satisfaction (Lenskyj 1991). However, in sports where performance can potentially be enhanced through weight loss, such as in distance running, pressure to be thin is significant.

Participant Homogeneity

Given the relative accessibility of running, one might think that the sport would appeal to those with limited financial resources. However, distance running is predominantly a sport of the middle classes (Abbas 2004). Thus my study is based on the experiences of university athletes,

who tend to be disproportionately middle class. Abbas (2004) argues that the pursuit of health-promoting activities is generally associated with middle class values. The economic privilege of a middle class lifestyle enables the purchase of healthy foods, exercise equipment, and leisure time. Distance runners in particular can benefit from the ability to purchase healthy foods, as diet and nutrition play a key role in optimizing performance. Those with limited financial resources might thus be deterred from entering higher-level competition if they are unable to fulfill their dietary needs. However, other sports also require high energy levels, attention to diet, and significant time commitments. Furthermore, slimness is idealized by Western culture not only for elite runners, but also for the general population. These factors leave questions as to why distance running tends to be a predominantly middle class pursuit.

Distance running is not only a middle class pursuit. It is also disproportionately Caucasian, at least within women's CIS cross country and track. Although there is more diversity internationally, Caucasian women are overrepresented in university distance running in Canada. The lack of diversity within women's distance running raises some interesting questions about racial segregation in sport, especially given the relative accessibility of the sport. It has been suggested that racial segregation in sport is the result of streaming that takes place among young athletes, where individuals are often channelled into sports through external influences (Cashmore 1983). According to this theory, individuals may receive subtle encouragement to undertake certain sporting pursuits and discouraged to pursue others. Coakley (2003) found that once internalized, racial stereotypes can affect participation patterns in sport. Coakley argues that motivation to excel in particular sports can help reproduce stereotypical participation patterns. In track and field, coaches may inadvertently stream young athletes into distance, field or sprinting events in such a ways as to produce racial segregation.

It could also be possible that something within the subculture of distance running resonates more closely with white middle class women than with women of other backgrounds. Cahn (1994) notes that certain sports have been constructed as masculine or feminine and that sport deemed feminine have traditionally attracted white middle class women. Using track and field as an example, Cahn (1994) argues that black women have readily embraced athletic identities and thus may be less concerned about participating in sports deemed masculine. Although distance running is not necessarily a feminine sport, it does promote cultural values mandating thinness for women, which has been identified as particularly important for white middle class women.

While one can speculate as to why women's distance running seems to lack racial diversity in Canadian universities², this issue is relatively unexplored. Distance running is not an overly feminine sport and is certainly among the more accessible sports. Further research is needed in order to understand racial segregation in sport. Future research aimed at understanding demographic trends within distance running could reveal important findings, as well as potentially improve equity and accessibility within the sport. While running is indeed an accessible sport, one must question the degree of this accessibility when distance running seems to cater primarily to a relatively privileged group.

Theoretical Framework

Distance running is particularly relevant to Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies' due to its emphasis on self-regulation. Foucault's (1975) concept of *docile bodies* refers to the internalization of disciplinary practices, ultimately with them becoming self-regulating. Distance

² While the interview data suggests a lack of racial diversity in women's CIS cross country and distance events in track, it is important to acknowledge the non-Caucasian's who do participate in these sports.

running subcultures emphasize training, nutrition and the balancing of caloric intake with energy output; behaviours that require discipline and self-regulation. The following section describes Foucault's concept of docility in detail and explicates the potential connection between distance running subcultures and Foucault's understandings of discipline and power.

Docile Bodies

Michel Foucault wrote extensively on a variety of topics including sociology of the body. While Foucault was not a sports sociologist, the ideas he developed can be used to better understand how cultural discourses are reproduced through sport (Markula & Pringle 2006). More specifically, Foucault's work provides an understanding of how surveillance techniques become habitual within sporting environments and how sport constitutes a site of corporeal regulation. Foucault's work on corporeal disciplinary practices provides a particularly salient approach to understanding women's competitive distance running as a site of self-regulation and social control.

In his 1975 work *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault's discussion of power foregrounds the body as a site of social control. Foucault discusses the different ways in which sovereign powers sought control over subjects in both modern and pre-modern times. According to Foucault, modernity is characterized by new forms of social control that were previously non-existent. Foucault explains that the rise of modernity was accompanied by a shift from penal repression to disciplinary power. Disciplinary power, according to Foucault, constitutes a form of social control of unprecedented effectiveness due to its emphasis on self-surveillance and its ability to pervade all social institutions.

During medieval times, Foucault explains that social control was attained through penal repression. This occurred through torture and public executions, which Foucault refers to as the “the spectacle of punishment” (1975:39). The object of this spectacle was to inflict revenge upon the body of the convict for causing injury to the sovereign (ibid). In this era, crime was seen as a direct assault on the sovereign body and to restore order after a crime was committed, the convict’s body would be subjected to public torture, mutilation and death. This practice was intended to reassert sovereign power through public displays of corporeal punishment.

Foucault (1975) argues that the rise of modernity was accompanied by penal reforms that precluded the use of torture. The disappearance of what Foucault calls ‘the spectacle of punishment’ coincided with the rise of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is a form of social control rooted in surveillance and regimentation that ultimately promotes self-regulation (ibid). Foucault argues that as public torture disappeared, surveillance techniques began to appear in social institutions, such as prisons, schools, workplaces, among many others (ibid). Since capitalism requires disciplined bodies, new forms of surveillance and regimentation not only replaced cruel and less effective physical punishment, but also facilitated the rise of capitalism, the new economic order (ibid). The rise of surveillance practices helped instil the population with qualities necessary for the functioning of capitalism. While some have attributed the abolishment of torture to human enlightenment and progress, Foucault suggests that penal reforms were merely a reflection of the economic and social changes of the era (ibid). These reforms provided a means to assert greater control over large populations, and ultimately, to bolster capitalist objectives.

Surveillance and disciplinary techniques target the body as an object and locus of power (Foucault 1975; Markula & Pringle 2006). Such techniques are subtle and increase mastery over

one's own body (Markula & Pringle 2006:39). Foucault explains that in modern societies, individuals are constantly exposed to surveillance in ways that are covert and thereby ostensibly invisible. Foucault argues that the subtle nature of this surveillance leads to its normalization. According to Foucault, individuals internalize the surveillance techniques they are subjected to and thus become self-regulating. Foucault refers to these self-regulating bodies as 'docile bodies.'

A disciplined body not only responds to disciplinary techniques through compliance, but also does so efficiently (Foucault 1975). Foucault asserts that "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (1975:137-138). Key features of docility include discipline, economical efficiency and political obedience (Markula and Pringle 2006:20). Bodies become 'docile' through exposure to disciplinary techniques, such as repetitive exercises and manipulation involving the use of space, time and architecture (Markula & Pringle 2006). For instance, rigid timetables facilitate regimentation and panoptic architecture³ can promote surveillance.

Sport and exercise constitute forms of disciplinary practice through which docile bodies are shaped (ibid). Different exercise techniques produce different types of bodies suited to particular sports, or particular cultural ideals. Markula & Pringle (2006:41) point out that disciplinary technologies can produce a multitude of bodies within a fitness context, such as overweight, underweight, fit and unfit, among others. Coaching practices can help sustain such bodies within specific sporting environments (ibid). Disciplinary technologies, such as drills,

³ Panoptic architecture refers to architectural designs that facilitate mass surveillance in which subjects cannot tell when they are being observed, thereby forcing them to engage in self-regulation. This concept is derived from Jeremy Bentham's prison design, the Panopticon, which consists of a circular prison structure with a central watch tower.

skill sessions, fitness programs or punitive measures can all serve to create docile bodies capable of fitting into a particular athletic setting (ibid). In fact, the highly regimented nature of athletic training renders sport a particularly efficient way to promote docility.

Distance running provides an exceptionally efficient way to produce docility since it is a sport that requires a great deal of self-regulation and discipline in order to achieve success. Distance running is also marked by surveillance practices that permeate deep inside the sport's subculture. These practices are particularly pronounced in women's distance running, where dominant discourses on gender and the body are reproduced through a variety of mechanisms. For example, shorter distances for women's races, involvement of coaches in corporeal matters and sex verification policies all constitute mechanisms by which female runners are subjected to heightened levels of surveillance. There is also a great deal of pressure to maintain a thin, lean physique within women's distance running. Consequently, many runners tend to develop preoccupations with weight, which result in heightened self-regulation. Pressure to be thin within competitive environments also prompts runners to compare their bodies and diets to those of other runners, thus creating a culture of surveillance within the sport. This culture of surveillance operates in a covert fashion, whereby individuals subconsciously engage in self-surveillance and surveillance of others. Women involved in competitive distance running thus come to exemplify docility.

Chapter Two – Methodology

Canadian University Running

Distance running in Canadian universities is overseen by Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the governing body for university athletics. Four regional conferences operate under CIS. These are Atlantic University Sport (AUS), Ontario University Athletics (OUA), Canada West Universities Athletic Association (CanWest) and RESQ (Reseau du Sport Etudiant du Quebec). Distance runners who compete at the university level typically take part in both cross country and track; two of the many sports regulated by CIS.

For both men and women, cross country teams who compete in championship races are comprised of seven athletes. Although more than seven athletes may compete for a school in intercollegiate races throughout the season, only seven are permitted to compete in conference championships and at the CIS championships. Only the first five finishers of those seven count towards the team's score. Team scores are calculated by adding the places of the top five finishers. The team with the lowest score wins. In CIS cross country races, women typically run five kilometres, while men run races between five and ten kilometres long. At championship races, the men's races are always ten kilometres long.

In CIS track and field, men and women normally compete in all of the same events. The events for men and women are the same except for the weight of throwing implements (men's are heavier), the height of hurdles for hurdling events and the distance run in the pentathlon (men run 1000 metres, while women run 800 metres). As with cross country, there are numerous meets throughout the season which are followed by a conference championship. Subsequently, there is a CIS championship for those who qualify.

Gendered aspects of distance running become more pronounced as the level of competition increases. There are various levels of competition in distance running. There are recreational running events open to the general public, high school events, university events, as well as provincial, national and international competitions. University running in Canada is competitive, with national championships drawing many of the country's top athletes. University athletes typically take their athletic pursuits seriously and dedicate much of their time and energy to their training. While there are higher levels of competition at the national and international levels, university running in Canada can be said to be 'elite'.

Elite level races can be distinguished from recreational events in that they are much more competitive. Elite level runners also invest a great deal of time and energy into their sport and form unique subcultures centred on their athletic pursuits and their identities as athletes. They spend countless hours in each other's company: travelling, competing, socializing and sometimes even living together. Close relationships form between runners. A subculture forms as their athletic pursuits become central to their identities. Given the sheer magnitude of their involvement, the experiences of elite level athletes are very different from those who run recreationally. Moreover, sex segregation, modified events for women and sex verification testing all apply more stringently to elite level races. My research focuses on the experiences of competitive distance runners in order to examine whether dominant discourses on gender and the body permeate the structure and subculture of the sport.

Data Collection

The purpose of this research is to provide a dense description of how female distance runners experience their sport, their gender and their bodies. A qualitative research method was employed which provided a rich source of data which captured the distinctive lived experiences

of female runners. Semi-structured interviews were completed with nineteen middle-distance runners competing in intercollegiate cross country or track at a Canadian university. For the purpose of this study, "middle-distance" was defined as any race of between 800 metres and five kilometres long. Semi-structured interviews involve the use of an interview guide but typically employ open-ended questions which allow participants to expand on their responses and volunteer unexpected dimensions to the conversation (Adler & Clark 1999). While participants are asked a pre-determined set of questions, the ordering of the questions may vary (Knox & Burkard 2009). The interviewer may probe specific areas in more detail, asking spontaneous questions and allowing the participants to speak freely (Berg 2007; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). In this way, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and can provide information that may be overlooked by a more rigidly structured interview process.

The interviews centered on the experiences of the runners in relation to training, competition, gender and the body. Each interview began with questions on demographic background before proceeding to in-depth questions about their involvement in distance running (see appendix for full interview guide). Participants were asked to talk about their lived experiences as distance runners, femininity, the body and how their experiences were impacted by these factors. They were also asked their opinions on gendered practices within their sport, such as mandated shorter races for women and sex verification testing. Subjects were also asked to talk about leanness in relation to the sport's subculture.

Recruitment

Following approval from the McMaster University Research Ethics Board, I began to collect data. Subjects were recruited through my connections to running communities in Nova Scotia and Ontario. As a distance runner myself who trained and competed in those two

provinces, I was able to recruit participants through informal networking. Prospective participants were initially approached informally. Subsequently, I supplied them with a formal recruiting document. All of the participants in the study were either involved in competitive running at the university level at the time of the interviews, or had been within the past three years.

Because distance running subcultures can vary according to level of competition, I decided to focus exclusively on the experiences of intercollegiate athletes. University running is one of the highest levels of competitive running in Canada. CIS championships are held in both cross country and track. Participants were required to be either (i) female distance runners currently competing in CIS cross country or track or (ii) be former female distance runners who have participated in CIS cross country or track within the past three years.

Participant Characteristics

In addition to being elite female runners, the participants shared several other characteristics. They were similar in age, race and sexual orientation. Their ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-four, with twenty being the average age. All of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, heterosexual and most described their socio-economic positions as middle-class. Some described having access to vacations and organized sports, such as golf, skiing and hockey. They were also asked about their parents' occupations, which included customer service representative, bus driver, teacher, welder, small business owner, engineer, nurse, journalist, statistician, bank manager, professor, real estate agent, government worker, technical support personnel, and police officer. Many of the participants came from dual income households. All but four were working towards an undergraduate degree. The others were enrolled in graduate programs.

The research participants were also homogeneous in terms of race and sexual orientation. While an effort was made to obtain a more racially diverse group using a snowball sampling technique, this approach did not yield results. The runners interviewed claimed that within their experience, most of the athletes involved in Canadian university distance running tend to be Caucasian. It was pointed out that there seems to be more racial diversity on the men's side, as well as in sprints; however, none of the athletes had any female teammates in distance running who were visible minorities on their university teams. While some had teammates in high school who ran cross country or distance track events, none of these athletes went on to compete at the university level. Further, some claimed that they also tend to observe very few minority women at university cross country meets. It was suggested that middle distance running in Canada tends to be dominated by Caucasians. The homogeneity of my research participants in terms of race, class and sexual orientation clearly presents a major limitation to my study; however, it also raises important questions regarding demographic trends within the sport.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be broadly understood as a process of self-reflection through which one recognizes how research is affected by the social position and personal experiences of researchers (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Gouldner 1970). Recognizing the relationship between social position and knowledge position can serve as a means to counter personal bias in sociological research, as well as to understand how social position can influence the process of knowledge production (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). By sharing the same identity of 'runner' as my research participants, I possess a certain degree of knowledge of my research topic that an outsider would not be privileged to. For example, having competed in CIS cross country and track for five years provided me with insider knowledge that influenced the direction my project

took. Having personal knowledge of the sport's subculture allowed me to develop my interview guide. For instance, my personal experience helped guide which questions I deemed important to ask during interviews. Having a personal connection to my research also helped build rapport between myself and participants, as well as provided me with a greater understanding of the stories they shared. Being relatively close in age, by sharing the same gender and by sharing some of the same experiences, participants may have felt more comfortable disclosing information.

Conversely, it is also possible that our shared similarities may have deterred some participants from sharing personal information. Because I trained and competed with many of my research participants, they knew me on a personal level in addition to knowing me as a researcher. Consequently, some may have felt less comfortable disclosing personal information, or information about others within our shared athletic communities. Although being so closely connected to my research on a personal level may thus be viewed as a limitation, it can also be viewed as an advantage by allowing me to capture a more complete representation of distance running subcultures. In general, the participants seemed eager to share their experiences and disclose information regardless of my insider status, or perhaps even because of it.

As an insider to a subculture in which one is researching, it is important to recognize that the experiences of participants may be very different from one's own (Dwyer & Buckle 2009). Caution must be taken to avoid assumptions of similarity based on a shared identity (Dwyer & Buckle 2009). For example, despite experiencing distance running first-hand and despite sharing many similarities with my research participants, I listened to their stories without making assumptions or drawing conclusions based on my own experiences. I am also aware that the qualitative nature of my study means that my findings cannot be generalized to broader

populations (Lietz & Zayas 2010). Indeed, the relatively homogeneity of my participants further reduces any potential for generalizing results and means that my findings are only applicable to the small group I studied.

Interview Procedure and Data Coding

The interviews were held with nineteen female distance runners who competed at three Canadian universities: one in Nova Scotia and two in Southern Ontario. Most interviews were held in public spaces, typically on or near university campuses. One interview was held in the home of a participant, at her request. Each interview lasted between twenty-five and sixty minutes. The interviews were centered on the athletic experiences of the runners in relation to cultural discourses on gender and the body. With the permission of participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Pseudonyms were selected for the participants and identifying information, such as names and places, were removed from the transcripts. Following transcription, a thematic analysis was conducted using grounded theory. Grounded theory involves a dynamic process of coding and analysis through which explanatory categories are generated (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Each transcript was reviewed numerous times, allowing codes to be identified. Similar concepts were grouped together and themes were then identified to develop an understanding of women's distance running in relation to dominant discourses on gender and the body. The major themes that emerged from the data were gender and body image, with several subthemes appearing in each category. A significant portion of the interviews was spent discussing body image and how the subculture of distance running promotes the idealization of thinness. Surveillance was identified as central to the reproduction of gender norms and the pursuit of thinness within the subculture of the sport. As such, the data were informed by Foucault's theory of 'docile bodies' in order to illustrate how body

commodification, idealized femininity and traditional gender ideals shape the experiences of female distance runners.

Chapter Three – Pounds are Seconds: The Cult of Thinness in Women’s

Distance Running

This chapter reports findings on how women’s distance running replicates the dominant discourse mandating thinness for women. It was found that surveillance practices within the sport operate in ways that intensify societal pressures for women to be thin. Participants experienced pressure from a variety of sources, such as coaches, conversations about diet and from clothing. It was also apparent that the pressure runners feel to be thin is developed internally, largely rooted in performance, although general societal pressures compounded this pressure. While female runners already face appearance-based pressures stemming from societal definitions of feminine beauty, they also face performance-based pressures stemming from associations between thinness and competitive success. Because of this, the *cult of thinness* is arguably more pronounced within distance running subcultures.

This chapter begins by outlining the general connection between running and body image and then examines the specific sources of pressure experienced by runners. Coaches, conversations about food, body comparisons, internal pressure and clothing were said to create body image anxiety among runners. These sources of pressure are analyzed according to Foucault’s concept of docile bodies.

Body Image and Running

Body image is a key theme that emerged from the interviews. Many of the athletes reported that they have experienced body image anxieties stemming from their involvement in competitive running. Competitive running inherently rewards leanness and consequently, many of the runners interviewed maintained a thin, lean physique. Although it is important to note that

not all of the runners perceived pressure to be thin, there were a number of instances where the sport was described as a site that intensifies pressures for runners to be thin.

Beyond connections between thinness and running performance, they recognized that thinness is highly valued. Many felt pressure to control their weight. Interestingly, most identified participation in competitive running as creating an additional element of pressure to be thin. Many of the runners seemed to feel as though female runners are held to a higher standard of thinness than non-runners. When asked how pressures to be thin mesh the values of her sport's subculture, Haley responded:

To be attractive, to be feminine, that kind of equates to being thin. And I don't know, I think frail, very thin, that's what makes you sexy. And to be a female, you don't want to be a big female runner, like big overweight woman, like what are you doing running? Like you're female number one, so you should be thin anyways and if you're a runner, you should be really thin because you're a female runner. So yeah, I think it's a lot of pressure.

Haley's response also reveals feelings of being judged by her weight. Runners who do not fit into the thin ideal can be subjected to judgement by others. Haley's remarks suggest that heavier women involved in competitive running may be judged negatively, even subjected to ridicule. Her reference to "big, overweight women" indicates a negative connotation attached to female runners who fail to conform to the idealized image of thinness.

Other runners also claimed to feel judged by their weight and suggested that weight-based assumptions about running ability are frequently made. Kayla, for instance, perceived that weight is covertly monitored within her team environment:

it's kind of like that hush-hush thing that you don't talk about. Like no one's ever like 'oh, you've gained weight!' But in the back of you're mind you're like 'oh, that person's lost weight or that person's gained weight' and then you kind of monitor how they're running.

Similarly, weight was described as something that everyone was conscious of within their training environments. Some suggested that assumptions about running ability are often made based on a person's body type. Nicole described an experience she had while competing in high school where an athlete's ability was underestimated due to her large breasts: "she had like huge boobs, so you look at her and you're like 'you're not fast' cause you just see...(the boobs). And then she goes on to win everything!"

Runners with larger builds sometimes have their abilities questioned. Anna recounted how she was dismissive of a teammate's ability when meeting her for the first time in university: "when they told me her time for the 800m, I was like 'there's no way that girl can move that fast!' But then you see her run and it blows your mind. She does really well and I think that's great." Anna explained that despite being inaccurate, it is difficult to avoid making assumptions about ability based on body weight because you rarely see larger runners win races.

Megan noted another variant of the relationship between body size and perceived ability: "I've had teammates or coaches that would be at the starting line of a race and somebody will look over and see a girl that's very tall and very thin and they'll just say 'oh my gosh, she's gonna win!'" Megan also expressed feelings of being judged herself because she is built larger and more muscularly than most distance runners. Megan said these feelings of being judged have prompted her to monitor her diet and exercise habits more closely. She explained: "I will watch what I eat, try to run more, try to get more exercise. Because I feel like people are going to judge me just because I have a bigger body."

Kayla explained that people will sometimes make off-hand comments such as "that girl does not look like a runner." Such comments are sometimes made when new athletes join the

team each year: “when you get a whole set of rookies and you look at them.....it happens.” While several runners said that weight-based assumptions about ability are common within the sub-culture of distance running, Anna’s and Nicole’s experiences reveal how such assumptions are often flawed. Tellingly, the runners claimed that they could not help making such assumptions at times; they are ingrained. They also acknowledged that weight-based judgements should be avoided since they are often inaccurate.

Failure to conform to the thin ideal undermined their current and future identities as runners. Haley, who had recently graduated from university and was no longer running with her team, explained that she felt as if she no longer fit in with the university runners at her local track:

Well, now that I’ve stopped running in university and going back to the track and seeing the runners, I feel like I don’t fit in with them anymore because I’m not training at the same level and.....cause I’m not as thin as when I was training. And like, I know what my weight was when I was in peak training. I was fifteen pounds lighter.

Jessie, another recent graduate, also expressed a desire to maintain a body consistent with the ‘runner’s image’:

Now where I’m not on the team anymore, having graduated out of it..... I just...I’m doing it by myself now because I’m trying to keep up with the image, the body image associated with being an athlete. Even though I don’t have the time to do it anymore, I’m trying to make time to make sure I stay in that type of shape.

Haley’s and Jessie’s comments indicate an association between weight and feelings of belonging within the running subculture.

Sources of Weight Concerns

It was stressed by several runners that pressure to be thin tends to be more pronounced among competitive runners than among recreational runners. Several runners said that the pressure to be thin increased as they progressed to higher levels of competition. For example, Megan said “I feel like the pressure doesn’t start until you start performing well.” Several runners claimed that as they progressed from high school and club teams into university teams, they felt increasing pressure to be thin. Some claimed that prior to joining university teams; they never felt pressured to be thin within their training environments. These claims are consistent with patterns indicating that pressure to be thin is felt more strongly by veteran runners than by rookies. Although several runners identified sources of pressure that were external to the running subculture, most claimed that competitive running environments create an additional layer of pressure that is experienced specifically by runners.

When discussing the sources of their body image concerns, the athletes identified several reasons why runners might feel pressure to be thin within competitive environments. The most cited sources of pressure were coaches, seeing thin runners succeed, being surrounded by thin people and ‘themselves’. Conversations about food were also cited as a source of pressure to be thin by some of the athletes and it was suggested that clothing can also help encourage athletes to maintain a lean physique.

Coaches

While it is important to note that many coaches do not overtly engage in training methods that draw attention to body weight, they are a subtle source of body image anxiety among female runners. During our conversation about body image, Haley stated “I think coaches unknowingly just kind of expect you to be thin.” Megan said “coaches want something to show for their hard

work that they put into their athletes.” Thirteen out of nineteen runners said that coaches caused runners to become concerned with body image. Stories of coaches commenting on their weight or the weight of other runners were common. Three runners were told directly by their coach that they need to lose weight, while one was told she needs to ‘watch what she eats’. Several other runners also shared stories of coaches who spoke to them about diet in the context of weight loss. Six athletes had coaches who made comments to teammates about losing weight and one had a coach who would comment regularly on the weight of other female athletes in her running community.

Two athletes claimed that they had never had a coach who made direct comments about weight but still felt that coaches play a role in promoting weight loss. For example, Kara claimed that her coaches never pressured her to lose weight, although she has friends on other teams who do feel such pressure from their coaches. Kara explained that her friends describe this pressure as a vibe given off by their coaches:

I definitely have friends who feel that they need to be thin and that they need to look a certain way for their coaches. They feel like their coach does not approve....silently, they don't say anything, um, but that's just kind of the underlying tone at their practices.

While Kara's account was based on intuition rather than concrete examples of coach behaviour, it nonetheless provides insight into how runners experience their relationships with coaches on a number of levels.

Unlike Kara, however, most of these runners were able to identify concrete actions by coaches that led them to feel this way. For instance, Jasmine said that she has witnessed coaches speak of runners being too heavy: “Um, I won't mention names, but he would often comment on like, girls that didn't train with him anymore but that moved on to a different coach and got

bigger and stuff like that.” Jasmine explained that her former club coach would often comment on the weight of other runners, especially runners who have previously trained with him and chose to switch to another club or coach.

Jessie was another runner who explained that coaches were a key source weight concern within her training environment. Having ended her four-year varsity career as a distance runner the year before her interview took place, she described her athletic environment as one where there was substantial pressure to be thin. According to her, coaches play a key role in maintaining this pressure. She thought that one of her teammates was asked by a coach to lose weight: “I think this actually came into issue at one point, where someone was actually asked to lose weight in order to be.....for performance wise.” Jessie felt that some coaches encourage weight loss as a strategy to improve performance, which can be damaging to those who turn to unhealthy practices in order to do so.

Two of the runners interviewed said that coaches sometimes weigh their athletes, which can provoke anxiety for runners who have any concerns about body image. Mia relayed that her former club coach once weighed everyone on her team both before and after practice to determine how much water the athletes were losing during workouts. Although Mia was adamant that her coach did not mean to cause anxiety and that the weigh-ins were purely used a tool to promote proper hydration, she recalled that some runners felt uncomfortable being weighed by the coach. She stressed that her coach conducted himself very professionally and weighed people individually to prevent the runners from feeling anxious about others knowing their weight. Nonetheless, some runners were not comfortable with their coach knowing their weight.

Megan also pointed out that even the presence of a scale contributes to the pressure to be thin. According to Megan, the coach at a rival university required his athletes to be a certain weight to become a member of the cross country team at all. When asked how she felt about coaches incorporating weight control into their training regimens, Megan said “I feel like getting women on a scale would be so wrong. And having weight restrictions.....like, I know other universities that are very good have weight restrictions.” Megan explained that even athletes who did well in the try-out but did not meet the weight requirement were “put on a plan.” The coach at that school required athletes to lose weight because “they still need you to look like a runner.....they’re gonna change how you look. They really will.”

Haley, a former varsity cross country and track athlete, also felt that coaches play an important role in promoting thinness within the running subculture. She described an incident during her time on a university track squad when her coaches asked her to speak to a teammate about diet and nutrition. They wanted Haley to speak to this runner about healthy eating in hopes that she could help her teammate lose weight. Haley declined, saying that it “was not my place” to speak to another athlete about her weight.

Haley’s experience reveals that coaches not only pressure runners to lose weight, but sometimes do so in ways that are ethically questionable. For a coach to single out a runner as overweight and discuss her weight with other team members constitutes a breach of confidentiality. While the coach in question may have thought he was addressing the situation in a sensitive manner, his actions were clearly inappropriate. He not only discussed the personal business of one runner with another athlete, but in doing so he also put Haley in a difficult position. Haley felt that her coach had placed her in a conflict of interest. If she refused to speak to her teammate she would be letting down her coach. But following through with his request

could potentially jeopardize her relationship with her teammate, who may be offended by unwanted advice. Haley felt uncomfortable conversing with her coach about her teammate's weight.

Haley was particularly bothered by this incident since she had also experienced pressure from coaches to lose weight when she first joined her university cross country team. Being asked to speak to another runner about her diet served as a reminder to Haley that coaches expect their athletes to be thin:

And even, the thing was just thinking back to that comment by (coach), it was kind of an expectation, like 'oh, you'll lose some weight', as if I needed to. But looking back, I didn't need to. Like, I was healthy! I was the weight I am now-I was lighter than I am now...and they say I need to lose some weight.

Haley described her training environment as one where the pressure to be thin was intense.

Ultimately, Haley felt that coaches should refrain from making comments to athletes about their weight.

Haley's coaches were not the only ones whose coaching practices were ethically questionable. Numerous athletes relayed stories of coaches using harsh and sometimes inappropriate tactics to incorporate weight control in their training regimens. Some athletes were told bluntly to lose weight and some were subjected to intense criticism about their bodies. Nicole, for instance, was told by her club coaches in high school "you're running with a ten pound backpack on your back." Olivia's friends on another team were told by their coach "pounds are seconds" and were asked what they could eliminate from their diets. A member of Emily's club team was told by their coach "you need to start exercising and lose that weight." Megan's club coach in high school spoke to her on several occasions about her diet and weight. Her coach would say things such as 'you're fat', 'you look heavy' or 'you have too much body

weight', and would also offer tips on how to lose weight. These conversations left her feeling hurt and self conscious about her body.

Megan's coach not only encouraged her to lose weight by calling her 'fat'. He actually felt her leg and told her where she needed to lose weight. This happened when she returned to club practice after a winter break, during which she had reduced her mileage. Megan explained:

I came back from winter one year.....and he said 'you look fat'. He really said that. He said look at your face, you're heavy. And your legs. And then he literally felt my leg... He was like 'that's fat on your leg'.

By feeling her leg, Megan's coach overstepped his authority and violated her bodily integrity.

While the argument can be made that commenting on an athlete's weight is merely a coaching strategy aimed at improving performance, Megan's coach did so in a way that clearly lacked sensitivity and respect. Under no circumstances should a coach touch an athlete without permission. Even if her coach was intent on discussing weight with Megan, he should have done so without touching her body and making her uncomfortable.

This was not the only experience Megan had with coaches pressuring her to lose weight. Following the touching incident, Megan described several other examples of weight-related remarks made by her coach in the months that followed while she continued to train with him. She was once told that her high school race results were a reflection of her body weight:

after I had a bad race.....after he said that it was outdoor track season at my high school and he said....he said 'well, that's what you get. You're out of shape. That's what you get.' Because I didn't have a good race. And he was like 'that's what you get. Your legs aren't fit. You have too much body weight.'

While the runners had their own ways of responding to coach's criticisms of their bodies, all of them described how these comments had a way of sticking with them and making them

more self-conscious. Coming from male authority figures, they remained embedded in their minds for a long time and surfaced every so often, causing them to reflect critically about their weight. For instance, after the incident when her coach called her ‘fat’ for the first time, Megan felt that she changed the way she thought of herself, her body and her training: “I’ll never forget that. But that has shaped me. It’s made me want to be fit and never lose the fitness that I have again. To stoop down to somebody else thinking that I’ve put on weight”. Megan explained that after being called ‘fat’ she pushed herself excessively hard to perform:

I just wanted to impress him and to get to the top again. But I feel like that’s always hanging over me now. When I look back, he’s like ‘you’re never going to get back to where you were.’ And I just feel like that’s always going to be hanging over me, going to be there...I just can’t get it out of my system. I just feel like I’m not fit and I’m not there.....My terms have changed. I changed the way that I think of myself.

Her coach’s remarks were powerful. Although she suggested that her coach’s words may have pushed her to train harder, they also had a demoralizing effect. Megan felt like she would never be able to measure and that even when she does perform well, it is never good enough. Her coach’s words left her with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy.

Megan’s feeling of being unable to forget what her coach said to her also made her more preoccupied with her weight. Her reference to “someone else thinking that I’ve gained weight” reveals that she is conscious of how her body is perceived by others, which in turn promotes self-surveillance. By criticizing their athletes’ bodies, coaches unwittingly make athletes more self-regulating, and by extension, docile. Commenting on an athlete’s weight affected workouts, food intake and appearance consciousness, which ultimately led to high levels of control and surveillance within training environments.

Coaches also commented on diet. Several athletes relayed how coaches asked them or their peers to make dietary changes. Athletes were asked to eliminate things from their diets, were asked to pay more attention to their diets and to avoid excessive snacking. Megan, for instance, was told to limit bread, especially white bread. Megan thought that when he would speak to the team as a whole, his comments seemed directed toward her:

He says like, ‘you should be staying away from certain foods. And he’ll say this to me. He’ll be like ‘you can tell when you’re a carb starved person. Stay away from white bread. Stay away from a lot of bread.’

By making positive references to ‘carb-starved people’, the coach implies that runners should deprive themselves of carbohydrates, or at least look like they are depriving themselves. (In reality avoiding carbohydrates is not healthy, especially for endurance athletes.) By drawing attention to both diet and appearance, her coach’s words spoke to how self-regulation is promoted within the subculture of distance running.

Like Megan, several other runners experienced pressure to monitor their weight and food intake. Ellen was once asked to ‘watch what she eats’: “once you’ve been told that once, you look online and there’s all this information on race weight, it becomes ingrained in you that you need to be vigilant about that kind of stuff.” After being told by her coach that running will help her lose weight, Haley became more concerned with her body size and ended up developing disordered eating patterns. She went through a period where she did not eat enough to sustain her activity level and consequently, she was unable to keep up with her training. Fortunately, she subsequently developed healthier eating habits and learned to focus less on her weight. One of Anna’s teammate also developed unhealthy eating habits after being told by her coach to lose weight. Fortunately, she was also able to overcome her problem and developed healthier

attitudes towards her body. The stories told by Haley, Anna and others indicate that comments from coaches about weight can have a profound effect on athletes.

Anna also expressed that weight related comments also resulted in discomfort with eating in front of coaches. Since it is common to travel with the team and eat meals together, both team members and coaches have ample opportunity to observe each other's eating habits. Anna explained that although her usual diet is healthy, she is even more selective when she is with her team: "I think you're definitely more aware of what you're eating, what you're ordering when coaches are around." While her teammates would often get ice cream after a race, eating junk food in front of coaches could be uncomfortable:

it's almost weird going and getting a McFlurry and stuff...I think it depends on the coach. If you know they're not going to say anything then you can just do what you normally do. But if it's one you know has said something to people about losing weight then it would definitely run through my head what I order in front of them.

Anna claimed to feel more vigilant about what she eats in the presence of her coaches because teammates have been asked to lose weight.

The runners were even unable to forget comments made by coaches about weight long after the fact. Ellen explained that was unable to lose the feeling of being monitored by her coaches, even after leaving to attend university in another city:

Like every time I go back they're like 'oh, you look good!' And I'm like 'oh, that's nice!' Or if they don't say anything-they never say anything bad- it's like 'ok, what are they thinking?' They may not be thinking that, but because of that one time they talked about it, now I always feel like I'm being analyzed.

Several other runners were unable to forget comments made to them about their diet or weight. The following quotes illustrate how comments from coaches about weight have a tendency to stick with athletes:

I think it kind of affected me in terms of my perspective on my own body weight and I wish....well it just stuck with me....I just can't forget it. (Haley)

If you look at me and you think she's big, well she's tiny!....It makes me feel kind of...I know I'm not overweight, but it makes me more self conscious, you know what I mean? (Jasmine)

Every time I have a bad day, have a bad run, I always think of that. (Megan)

Ever since then it was always sort of at the back of my mind. Running with a ten pound backpack on my back....I didn't go on a diet or anything but it's still always sort of there. Like every so often I think about it. So that's changed because before I had not thought twice about how much I weighed. (Nicole)

Comments about weight made by coaches clearly carry a lot of weight and have a tendency to stick with athletes. While weight was not an issue for many of these runners prior to being criticized, it is something they became increasingly conscious of. Moreover, comments from coached tended to foreground body image concerns within training environments. Coaches are not only instrumental in pressuring athletes to be thin, but their comments can sometimes create hostile training environments, where athletes' bodies are subjected to intense levels of criticism and scrutiny.

While there was a general consensus that commenting on body weight is a poor coaching strategy, some runners seemed reluctant to criticize their coaches, perhaps as an indicator of an internalized 'docility.' For instance, Ellen claimed that her coaches "were really nice about it" and "very professional" when they spoke to her about her diet. Even Megan, after describing the hurtful things he said to her, finished by saying that her coach "*is* a nice guy, just not all the time." Another runner defended her former coach who told a teammate to "start exercising and lose that weight." While Emily acknowledged that her coach's words sound harsh, she put the situation into context as follows:

She (her teammate) went away to university, she stopped running and she came back and was like 'I really want to race'. I know this coach and I know it sounds really bad that she said that, but she was training this girl since she was,

like, in grade six so she was with her for at least six, seven years. She knew her personality well and she was like ‘you can handle me saying....listen you’re not going to be able to run as fast as you did. You need to work out and you came back and you gained weight. You’re not fit anymore’.

According to Emily, her coach did not act inappropriately since there was truth in what was said and since the coach knew the athlete well enough to know that she would not be offended.

In defending her coach, Emily raised the important question of whether coaches should include weight loss as part of their training programs. In a sport such as distance running, excess weight can hinder performance. Given that a coach’s job is to help athletes reach their full potential in their sport, as argued by Emily, suggesting that an athlete lose weight may not be unreasonable. As indicated by the data, however, comments from coaches about weight are sometimes associated with body image anxiety, disordered eating patterns and even full-blown eating disorders. Several athletes discussed how comments from coaches about weight made them feel bad, and in some cases, spurred them to adopt unhealthy weight-loss practices. Asking athletes to lose weight as a measure to improve performance clearly carries a certain degree of risk.

While some coaches directly ask their runners to lose weight, some approach the matter with more discretion, knowing that weight can be a sensitive topic for female runners. For instance, several runners reported how their coaches approach discussions about diet in a way that does not emphasize weight loss. Some athletes described having coaches who discuss diet in such a way as to emphasize nutrition and maintaining optimal energy levels, rather than weight loss. Other athletes relayed how their coaches would arrange nutritional seminars led by registered dietitians. Compared to coaches who suggest weight loss outright, such approaches to

addressing diet and weight in a training context were received more favourably among the athletes who discussed them.

Given the problems that can arise when coaches encourage weight loss, it is safe to conclude they should exercise extreme caution in doing so, if at all. While weight can influence performance in distance running, the athletes' experiences indicate that coach involvement in diet and weight has very negative effects. If coaches are committed to training their athletes in a manner that incorporates respect and sensitivity, they must refrain from criticizing the physical appearance of their athletes.

Conversations about Food

Conversations about food were another source of anxiety for some of the runners. Conversations with coaches as well as conversations among team members were both recalled. As discussed in the previous section, coaches sometimes create pressure to be thin by providing weight-loss tips, making diet suggestions, or even telling an athlete directly that she should lose weight. It was also the case, however, that in some cases, coaches also encourage runners to gain weight. The reactions to these conversations ranged from mild indifference to annoyance and anxiety about body image.

Most of the runners recalled that it is common for their teammates to talk about food. Conversations included things to do with nutrition, weight loss, diet comparisons, what to eat before racing and what people should be eating regularly. Some of the runners indicated that they simply talk about food because they love to eat and there is generally nothing negative about these conversations. However, some expressed that the constant focus of food as a topic of

conversation causes them to feel more self-conscious about their own diets. Specifically, conversations about diet and weight loss were said to increase the pressure they felt to be thin.

The diet comparisons described by the athletes reflect an element of surveillance present within the training environment. Comparing diets and discussing people's eating habits with others promotes covert self-regulation as discussed in Foucault's analysis of disciplinary societies. By heightening their concerns about body image, food related conversations often cause runners to increase their self-regulatory habits. Some conversations were described as being heavily centered on body regulation, with a specific focus on caloric intake and energy output. For example, Haley explained that two runners on her team would often talk about their diets and training:

It was moreso about what you ate and how much you were running. It wasn't really a number on the scale, like no one really talked about how much I weigh, but it was moreso 'oh I did two training workouts, had a really good breakfast, I only ate this or that. I think it was food and exercise. The conversation always came back to those two topics. Not so much weight, but it was kind of obviously leading to that.

Several other athletes described similar conversations about diet and exercise and it was suggested that such conversations prompt a heightened awareness of body image.

While it was clear that there is a great deal of discussion about dietary restriction and self-regulation, some athletes claimed that teammates often talk about engaging in gluttonous behaviour. Many claimed that because there is such a high prevalence of eating disorders among runners, they tend to take specific measures to disassociate themselves from weight-loss practices. It is common for runners to both speculate about others having eating disorders and to take measures to avoid similar speculations about themselves. For example, Brittany claimed

that many of her teammates often talk about all the junk food they eat. According to Brittany, her teammates are often exaggerating in order to deflect suspicions of having eating disorders:

I find people are always talking about all the food that they had eaten or that they're going to be eating, like junk food and stuff... I just think that some people, especially people that are really concerned about it, it's almost like they feel they have to say 'oh, I ate all this stuff' or 'I'm going to be eating all this' just because they almost feel they need to get across that they are eating all the time.

Kayla expressed a similar sentiment: "I know people talk about what everyone eats." She has had teammates who have developed eating disorders, some serious enough to require hospitalization. According to Kayla, this has helped fuel the constant focus on food within her team environment. Kayla stated: "I think some people feel the need to be monitoring them and while you monitor them, you start kind of monitoring everyone." Kayla further explained that this monitoring encourages behaviour aimed at deflecting suspicions of disordered eating habits. For example, Kayla claimed that she feels the need to eat in front of others, even if she is not hungry:

I find it really, really difficult just because...it's almost gotten to the point where it's difficult to eat in front of other people. Because let's say I had lunch and I meet people and they're like 'let's go for lunch', I already had lunch? And like, in my mind, I feel the pressure to eat another lunch even if I feel sick.

The fact that Kayla feels the need to make a display of her food consumption in front of others is indicative of a strong surveillance element present in her team environment.

Kayla was not the only runner who felt pressured by her teammates to eat in defined ways. Several other runners also described situations where they felt pressure to eat things they would normally avoid. Shannon explained that her teammates often talk about which foods are best and sometimes criticize her food choices. Shannon does not eat red meat or drink milk and her teammates sometimes tell her she should be consuming these products. Although Shannon

does not feel the effects of such pressure enough to change her diet, she described these conversations as “annoying.” Shannon said “a lot of runners tell me I should be eating those foods but I just really can’t stand them so that’s always annoying. Especially when it’s brought up several times.”

Anna also had teammates who have developed eating disorders and were subjected to peer surveillance. Anna explained they would often talk about what is healthy or normal to be eating and what constitutes a healthy body weight. According to Anna, these conversations were related to the fact that some of her teammates have lost a significant amount of weight, which prompted heightened surveillance among team members: you’re always kind of watching what a couple of the girls would eat because it wouldn’t always be very much.” Anna went on to explain that the focus on food within her team environment causes her to be more conscious about her own eating habits, especially in the presence of other runners. Anna stated:

I tend to eat healthy anyways, but I find that when I’m around other runners, I’m extra healthy or extra conscious of what I’m eating.....A lot of times I go places and I don’t order a lot or I won’t eat all of it and that works, sort of. But nights before races, I wouldn’t want the coaches to see that I’m only having a small portion of my meal, so I try to make it look like I’m eating enough I guess.

Alyssa also shared feelings of being more aware of her food choices around her teammates. She explained that she lived with some of her teammates and that there was a great deal of discussion about food in her home. This contributed to Alyssa’s heightened awareness about her own dietary habits:

You hear somebody talk about ‘I’m eating this’ sort of thing or ‘not eating this’ and then you think ‘oh, should I be doing that too? Or not doing that?’ Pressure to do what they’re doing.

According to Alyssa, such conversations can contribute to concerns about body image. By causing them to become more conscious of their bodies and diets, and in some cases to alter their diets, such conversations increase self-surveillance.

Body Comparisons

It was suggested by many of the runners that the pressure they feel to be thin stems in part from being surrounded by thin people. It was pointed out that runners tend to be thin, especially at higher levels of competition. Thirteen out of nineteen runners claimed that pressure to be thin arises from competitive environments, where the top athletes also tend to be the thinnest. For Anna, pressure to be thin stems in part from being surrounded by the thin people in her training circle:

I could be hanging out with basketball players or just friends and you feel like you're not really thinking about your body weight at all. But as soon as you're with runners, everyone is so fit and so lean that you're constantly comparing yourself to other people.

Many of the runners specified that they feel pressure to be thin because the fastest runners tend to be very thin. They equate thinness with competitive success. Although it was sometimes stated that losing weight is not the key to success, it was commonly expressed that seeing thin athletes succeed can contribute to concerns about body image. The following quotes illustrate how the runners have identified a connection between thinness and competitive success:

“You see some really good runners and they're like stick thin and you're like ‘oh, maybe if I'm that skinny I'll be able to run faster.’” (Olivia)

“I see that the girls that are running fast are skinny.” (Emily)

“I think it's [pressure to be thin] definitely there in the running culture and sometimes even more, but sort of in a different way. In just general society I

think it's more for beauty a lot of the time, but for running it's more, 'the thinner you are, the faster you'll go.'" (Nicole)

"Basically you look at who is winning and then you're like 'how am I different from them?'" (Kayla)

"When you look around at other runners that are racing against you and they're all thin, especially if they're good and fast and if you lose to one of them...I think (pressure) would come from that for me." (Jasmine)

"A lot of the people you see succeeding in running, they're all really small for the most part so it makes you think 'oh, if I was that much smaller, would I be able to do that much better? Maybe I couldn't be like that person but I wonder how much time I could shave off if I was ten pounds lighter, you know what I mean?'" (Brittany)

Internal Pressure

Eight out of nineteen runners interviewed said that they put pressure on themselves to be thin. While they all mentioned other sources of pressure, they also said that ultimately the pressure came from within:

"There's a lot of personal pressure too that I put on myself." (Ellen)

"It's probably pressure that I put on myself." (Emily)

"Pressure sometimes comes from coaches but I think it mostly comes from runners themselves." (Nicole)

"Part of the pressure is obviously from myself." (Brittany)

"I think it's internal." (Kayla)

Such statements highlight how the runners have internalized self-regulation to such a degree that they attribute this pressure to themselves. As stated by Foucault (1975), disciplinary societies are characterized by surveillance practices that operate in a covert fashion, thus leading to their normalization. Consequently, individuals adopt self-regulatory techniques, often without a strong awareness of external influences. By stating that they attribute pressure to be thin to

themselves, these runners exemplify how they have internalized surveillance practices, thus exhibiting docility.

Clothes

The types of clothing that runners typically wear are form-fitting and do not cover much flesh. Runners wear spandex shorts, tights, short, loose-fitting shorts, sports bras, tank tops, compression shirts and shimmels (tight tank-tops cut off at the midriff). It was suggested by many of the athletes that clothing contributes to the pressure they feel to be thin. When asked if clothing can provide an added incentive to maintain a certain body image, all of the runners responded affirmatively. Haley, for instance, suggested that running clothes, such as spandex, can encourage runners to stay thin or lose weight:

if you're a runner and you want to wear the running shorts and you don't have the body to fit in the running shorts then you're going to diet, exercise or do whatever it takes to fit into those running shorts. Whatever that is. You have to look, be a certain figure to fit into them. You definitely do. I know I would feel pressured to look nice in it or you're not going to wear it. And then you're not going to run.

Haley's comments emphasize the specific desire felt by some runners to wear running clothes. Indeed, it was suggested by several runners that running clothes can help solidify one's identity as a runner. Several runners claimed that running clothes promote a desirable image. Anna claimed that clothing or accessories, such as 'really cool spikes' can help solidify one's image as an elite athlete. Anna suggested that runners who wear nice running clothes are often assumed to be fast, although this is not always the case. Ultimately, fitting into running clothes and looking good in them were described as a goal that runners typically strive for. Clothing thus constitutes a potential source of body image concern, since such clothing accentuates body shape.

Several runners described how clothing made them pay more attention to their weight and body composition. Tight clothing, it was suggested, can make runners ‘feel big’ and heighten their awareness of body image. In this way, clothing can function as a source of self-regulation and surveillance. Megan described feeling as though she is under the constant surveillance of others while wearing spandex, prompting her to tone her body. Megan emphasized how clothing has the ability to intensify feelings of being under surveillance:

I feel like wearing spandex, you want to have nice legs. And you want to keep your legs free of cellulite....I think it provides the incentive to keep training and strengthen the muscles that are exposed that other athletes or coaches....that other people can see because I think that a lot of females feel as though they’re constantly being watched.

Katrina also commented on how clothing affects runners’ body image:

If you look at pictures of yourself running, you want to look good at the same time. You don’t wanna make a fool of yourself by looking...I don’t know....It’s easy for girls to think they’re big in comparison to other girls, even if they’re not big at all. The clothing kind of compounds that.

Other runners also indicated a preoccupation with weight that is closely linked to the clothing they wear as runners:

“I mean, to wear spandex you have to be compact in a way.” (Jessie)

“When you’re wearing those fitted tank tops you want to look nice in them.” (Kara)

“people are going to be able to see every little roll.” (Jasmine)

“I don’t necessarily like hanging out.” (Kayla)

These comments suggest a strong preoccupation with maintaining a lean, tight body, void of visible excess fat. Katrina’s comment about ‘making a fool of yourself’ highlights the extent to which this preoccupation is felt among some runners.

Several runners also discussed how tight clothing could make them feel self-conscious, regardless of whether or not they are comfortable with their weight. It was mentioned by several

runners that running clothes tend to be revealing and can make them feel self conscious; especially when they are competing and know that they are being watched. For example, Ellen said “If I had to wear something I wasn’t comfortable with then I would want to be making sure to maintain a certain appearance, not just for performance, but also because I’d feel like ‘well everyone’s going to be watching me run.’” The way that clothing was discussed by the athletes indicates an awareness of how their bodies are perceived by others, which in turn promotes increased self surveillance.

Several runners also talked about the sexualizing aspect of running clothes. Four runners mentioned that they are frequently yelled at from vehicles when they run in revealing clothes. Others mentioned that certain uniforms can sexualize runners. Jasmine, for instance, explained that she was required to wear “little bum shorts and a sports bra” when she represented Canada at the Junior Pan American Games. She described this uniform as “scandalous” and said that she felt uncomfortable wearing it.

Some runners discussed how some required team uniforms were too tight or too revealing for their taste. Kayla discussed the issue with her coach in hopes of having options available other than spandex:

I did some research into this because I was trying to talk to (coach) about this and that’s one of the things that I read about...the style of clothing can have a huge effect because you’re not going to wear spandex if you think you’re bigger. And the clothing that we’re given to race in....it’s not gonna fit everyone.

Kayla insightfully pointed out that team uniforms can function as a mechanism of control since they make runners feel more self conscious about their bodies: “I don’t think the coaches are making us wear it to control our weight, but on some level it’s doing that.” Kayla explained that

coaches do not do so consciously; however, by choosing uniforms that are form-fitting, coaches contribute to the pressures felt by runners to stay lean.

Kayla also suggested that the trend of tight, form fitting uniforms in distance running is not solely due to coach preferences. The trend of wearing form-fitting uniforms for competition is embedded within the subculture of women's distance running on a deeper level. Form fitting clothes are typically worn by competitive runners. Many of the runners preferred running in minimal clothing. When asked why they thought uniforms are form-fitting, the runners cited comfort, efficiency and tradition. While it may be difficult to identify the historical origin of tight, revealing uniforms within competitive environments, it would be ill-informed to suggest that coaches choose such uniforms to promote weight control. It is clear, however, that team uniforms that are particularly tight or revealing can promote the pursuit of thinness that characterizes distance running subcultures. Clothing can thus be seen as a conduit of surveillance, promoting bodily self-regulation and weight control.

Although some were uncomfortable wearing certain team uniforms, others had coaches who accommodated their preferences by providing a choice of several uniform options. For example, several runners explained that their coaches provided their team with the option of both short and long spandex shorts. Another runner said that her team members were allowed to wear any black shorts of their choice. While team members were previously required to wear the team shorts which were spandex, the coaches accommodated the runners' preferences by allowing them to compete in any black shorts. Kara's club coach provided her with a male singlet to compete in since she did not feel comfortable wearing the women's uniform, a shimmel. She felt more comfortable wearing the looser singlet. In sum, while team uniforms and running clothing can

heighten surveillance levels, some coaches take measures to accommodate the desires of their athletes and minimize any discomfort arising from uniforms.

Conclusion

The stories told by the runners underscore that there is a great deal of pressure to be thin within the already thin subculture of women's distance running. Although thinness is prescribed for women in general, women's distance running intensifies that. Several sources of pressure to be thin were identified within the subculture of women's distance running: comments from coaches about diet and weight; conversations about food; body comparisons; internalized pressure and clothing. These sources of pressure operate as surveillance mechanisms, which help replicate and intensify the dominant discourse mandating thinness for women. Runners who are exposed to these sources of pressure within their sport's subculture seem to internalize the surveillance mechanisms they are exposed to and become self-regulating. Surveillance from coaches, teammates and athletes themselves result in a subculture imbued with strong pressure to maintain a lean, thin physique.

In some ways, the pressure to be thin experienced by elite female distance runners parallels that of general societal pressures. However, the element of performance creates an additional layer of pressure. The *cult of thinness* is intensified within the subculture of women's distance running. The stories told by the runners reveal weight to be a central theme within the subculture of women's distance running, where many grow to develop deep preoccupations with body image.

Chapter Four – Gender Construction in Distance Running Subcultures

Despite progressive changes to women's sport, distance running remains distinctly gendered. For instance, the custom of mandating shorter distances for women's events still persists in competitive running. Female runners are also subjected to higher levels of medical surveillance. At the highest levels of competition, sex verification policies continue to discriminate against female athletes. Finally, as discussed in the previous chapter, female distance runners also experience heightened pressure to be thin within competitive environments. This chapter discusses how gender processes continue to shape the experiences of female runners. It is argued that female runners continue to face heightened regulation through shorter races, sex verification and increased medical scrutiny. These surveillance practices help sustain the superior status of men's running by constructing associations between femininity and physical deficiency.

Femininity and Athleticism

Because athleticism has historically been associated with masculinity, sport is sometimes experienced as a site of contention for female athletes (Messner 1988). Most runners claimed that, to some degree, athleticism and femininity are constructed in opposition to one another. While all the runners claimed to embrace their athletic identities, most claimed that athleticism is a quality that does not fit into traditional definitions of femininity. For example, when asked to describe femininity according to social convention, Katrina responded: "I guess the non-athletic types actually." Nicole responded to the same question by saying: "athletes aren't always the ideal female kind of thing because they also have, like, strength and sort of authority a lot of the time." Although many of the runners I interviewed identified inconsistencies between athleticism and femininity, some expressed that this stereotype is eroding as women's sport continues to grow.

Although athleticism has been predominantly constructed as masculine, distance running can be seen as stereotypically feminine in its promotion of bodily reduction. Most runners claimed that running embodies both feminine and masculine characteristics. Masculine aspects of running were said to include things such as required strength, competitiveness, pain, leanness and promotion of sweat and muscle growth. Several runners stated specifically that running promotes leanness and makes your body ‘hard’. Running was said to inhibit feminine curves and reduce breast size, which gives the sport a less feminine quality. Several runners specified that competitiveness is incompatible with traditional femininity. Anna, for instance, claimed that she sometimes feels bad passing her teammates during competition because competitiveness is incompatible with the feminine quality of ‘niceness’:

Sometimes I’ll be really close to my teammates in a race and it be hard to want to pass them or catch them and beat them and I think that kind of comes off as too competitive or you’re not being nice or considerate.....I feel like with the guys it’s almost...I don’t know if they even consider that. I think it’s a totally different mindset.

Anna felt that to a certain degree, her competitiveness is inhibited by traditional associations between associations between ‘niceness’ and femininity.

Several runners also claimed that running is incompatible with ‘prettiness’. Because running is pain inducing, it is difficult to control one’s appearance when competing. Consequently, some runners felt that running detracts from their efforts to ‘look pretty’. Anna, for instance, claimed that she used to be concerned about how she looked while running and had made a concerted effort to control her appearance. According to Nicole, running is not “the prettiest thing to watch.”

When asked what is feminine about the sport, most runners stated that running promotes thinness; a quality they defined as feminine. The runners were first asked to identify feminine

qualities according to social convention. They listed a number of traits, such as thin, weak, curvy, nice, caring and passive. Emphasis on appearance was deemed an important aspect of conventional femininity. Eleven out of nineteen athletes claimed that ‘looking good’ and putting effort into appearance are central elements of femininity. The relationship between running and femininity is thus complex. Running is both consistent with conventional femininity in that it promotes thinness and has other aspects which conflict with femininity, such as ‘prettiness’, sweatiness, strength and muscularity. Nicole succinctly summed up the perspective she shared with many of the runners in relation to her sport’s gendered attributes:

I think it might be a bit of both (masculine and feminine) because when you run, it’s not exactly the prettiest thing to watch. Like you can be hard and you get sweaty. But at the same time, people run to get in shape and lose weight and stuff so that could sort of contribute to being feminine.

Although running can be seen as being at odds with conventional femininity, it did not concern most of the runners I interviewed. Most had personal understandings of femininity that incorporated athleticism. They claimed that their identities as runners do not render them less feminine. Many even suggested that dominant understandings of femininity are changing in ways that incorporate athleticism. However, despite embracing their athletic identities and claiming to be generally unconcerned about gender ideals, some felt that gender can affect their experience in the sport. In a broader sense they felt that shorter races for women, sex verification testing and heightened involvement of coaches in corporeal matters continue to affect female runners. Several runners also claimed that female runners may be expected to manage their appearance more closely than male runners. Although some runners who described these things initially claimed to be unaffected by their gender, they went on to identify ways in which gender ideals do indeed make their way into the structure and subculture of their sport.

Shorter Distances for Women's Races

When asked if gender ideals have affected their experiences as runners, many responded affirmatively, pointing to shorter distances for women's races. In Canadian Interuniversity (CIS) cross country, women only run half the distance run by men; women run five kilometres while men run ten. Thirteen out of nineteen runners identified shorter distances for women's races as sexist or potentially problematic. Some runners claimed that the practice of making women's races shorter stems from traditional beliefs about women's bodies. Several runners drew parallels between women's historical exclusion from marathon running and present day modified running events for women. It was stated that women were previously thought to be ill-suited for strenuous physical activity such as marathon running, and that the practice of restricting the distance that women run is reminiscent of this belief. Although stereotypes about women's physicality are eroding, the fact that women's races are restricted to five kilometres indicates that they have yet to vanish completely.

While some runners identified the shorter distances they run as sexist, most claimed to not be particularly bothered by this arrangement. A few described shorter distances as "dumb" or "stupid" but also claimed that they personally prefer five kilometre races over ten. Some claimed to prefer longer races and would rather run ten kilometres than five, but were still not overly bothered by having to run shorter races. It was generally understood that there is no rational reason for restricting women's races to half the distance run by men. For instance, Haley said "I personally would rather run a ten than a five....I mean I'm not offended that we only run five, not really, but I don't see why they wouldn't....we could run ten." Jessie explained that while some women might be bothered by this practice, she does not mind the shorter races; however, she also described the arrangement as "stupid." She said

I mean I kind of wonder why there is that big gap because I feel like there isn't really any need for that. I mean I feel like there can be a 5k for both or a 10k for both.....I don't understand it at all.

Jessie went on to explain that the difference in distances run by men and women are likely the result of lingering stereotypes about women's physical capabilities:

I think it's probably traditional. I feel like there's kind of the view where women are weaker.....it's kind of like 'oh we know you guys probably can't do a 10k so you're going to do the 5k.' But no, I think it's stupid..... I think it's always been that way. I mean it's a lot better than probably what it has been in the past? Like I'm talking about, you know, ten, twenty years ago. Obviously we've come a long way but....I think there's still that kind of view on it.

Kara suggested that there is a dominant view that men should do more than women and that they must "prove themselves" in order to maintain their superior position. She said:

I think that some people still like to see men as....not dominant but above. Like men are on a pedestal and they have to almost prove themselves. Well not prove themselves but almost show that they are.....that they are the men.

Kara pointed out that even at the high school level boys always run farther than girls and "that says something about how women are seen in the sport." While gender stereotypes seem to be diminishing over time, Kara felt that stereotypes about male superiority continue to linger. Again though, like Haley and Jessie, Kara was not overly bothered by having to run a shorter distance, although she did identify the situation as problematic. She said: "I'm not bothered so much that I'm angry or upset, but it's just kind of in the back of my mind."

Megan also described the shorter distances as unnecessary and claimed that they are a result of lingering gender stereotypes: "I think it's just the way society has always been and I think that somebody a long time ago must have started that. Like 'oh, men can run faster so let's make them run farther.'" Megan also stated that she is happy running five kilometres. She also pointed out that women are forced to run shorter races throughout their whole careers and are

thus conditioned to appreciate the shorter distance. She claimed that many women are happy to run shorter races “because they haven’t built up to it.” For Megan, shorter distances for female races have been affecting her since the beginning of junior high school. Because female runners have been excluded from longer races throughout their careers, the practice became normalized, and as suggested by Megan, many women learn to favor shorter races. Megan’s discussion supports Foucault’s argument that the covert nature of surveillance techniques causes them to become normalized in ways that promote self-regulation. In this case, many women learn to appreciate shorter distances, and even become proponents of shorter races. For Megan, the shorter distance was preferred, although she claimed that she would have liked the opportunity to “build up” and run longer races.

Megan also suggested that having shorter distances for women could be the result of their growing success in the sport. Megan felt that perhaps men do not want to see women excel and thus restrict the distance they are able to run. Megan explained: “I think men were the ones that initiated this 5k, 10k business because maybe they felt that women were starting to come into the sport and starting to excel, so they didn’t want them to excel.” Megan’s theory is that having different distances for men’s and women’s races serves as a means to avoid comparisons between men and women. Forcing them to run different distances renders invisible the overlap of race times between men and women, thus preserving the ideology of male superiority. If Megan is correct in her assumption that some men may feel discomfort with women’s growing success in the sport, then forcing them to run shorter distances can serve as a means to limit the visibility of their success and preserve the superior status of men’s running. However, it is important to note that the decision to restrict the distance of women’s races is likely not a conscious one. Instead it is a product of gender ideology that has become ingrained in Western culture over

time. As beliefs about women's physicality become normalized, gendered practices are carried out subconsciously and dominant discourses are replicated. In this way, Foucault argues, docile bodies are produced.

Several athletes also noted that women's cross country races are not only shorter, but that the distances do not even increase from the high school level to the university level. While men jump from five kilometres to ten, women continue to run the same distance. In both Ontario and Nova Scotia, Senior Boys (grades 11 and 12) run seven kilometres and Senior Girls run five. The distance for men thus increases by three kilometres from high school to university. The distance that women run remains the same. A number of athletes expressed dismay that their race distance did not increase from the high school level to the university level. Several runners claimed that university level races for women should be longer than five kilometers. For instance, when asked if she is bothered by shorter race distances for women, Michele responded:

A little bit because ...it's not so much that we run shorter distances, it's that we don't increase from high school. Because we run 5k in high school and the guys run 7k and then they jump to 10k. At least if we increased to 6k it would seem more different than high school.

Catherine responded similarly:

It did kind of bother me when I came to university. I was like, 'why did the boys make a jump to 10k and we stayed at five? Like are we not as good?' Like, why did we not even jump to like seven kilometres or something? Cause they made a 3k jump, why couldn't we make a 2k jump?.....But for training I'm like 'oh I'm glad we don't have to run ten kilometres, but no, it definitely has crossed my mind that there is that inequality there.

Olivia also felt that the women's distance should increase from high school to university given that the men's distance increases significantly:

To me it seems like, ok, they're in high school, they run 7k and then jump to ten. We should be running six k or maybe seven kilometres. That would be an

equivalent increase that they went through.....But I don't know, maybe there is some sort of like, stereotype that they still have to work through there obviously.

Some runners felt that women's running is seen as inferior to men's running. Kara, for instance, claimed that men's running is seen as 'above', which is why they are required to run farther. While it was suggested that shorter races for women promote this perceived superiority of men's running, several runners noted other ways in which this perception develops. For instance, a few runners reported that people will sometimes jokingly attribute the poor performances of female runners to their gender. Ellen said that when a female runner is unhappy with a race time, male runners will sometimes make comments such as "that's ok cause you're a girl!" Mia and Nicole both stated that male teammates would sometimes say that they are faster because they are men. For instance, Nicole said "they're like 'I could beat you, you're just a girl.'" Nicole also said that people sometimes jokingly tell male runners that they "run like a girl." When asked if she had ever been exposed to gender discrimination in the context of running, Mia's response was "no, not really. Except the guys will say they're faster because they're guys.....they're like 'we're guys!'" While these incidents were described as occurring in a friendly or joking way, they can nonetheless help normalize the culture of male superiority.

Megan also experienced similar comments from her coach; however, these comments lacked the element of humour described by Ellen, Nicole and Mia. When asked if she had ever been exposed to sexism in the context of running, Megan stated that the abilities of female runners are sometimes underestimated. Megan described an incident where her ability was questioned because of her sex while training with a track club during her youth. Megan's coach dismissed her goals as unrealistic and told her the time she aspired to run for the 800 metres was too ambitious for a female. He stated that her goal time for the 800 metres was similar to what the male athletes in her club were running at the time and was thus unattainable. Megan said "I

was like ‘you know, I’d really like to run this 2:12 or something and my coach was like ‘well that’s unattainable because that’s something guys run.’” Megan did acknowledge that she was young when she set her goal of 2:12 and that perhaps her training was not yet there; however, she still felt that her coach should not have pointed to her sex as the cause of any training limitations. She stated “they just said that’s unattainable because I was a girl.” Since a 2:12 over 800m eight hundred is attainable for female runners, Megan’s coach should have refrained from mentioning her sex as a limitation to her goal.

The incident described by Megan, and comments, shared by Ellen, Nicole and Mia, help reinforce the perception that female runners still face biological myths about their running abilities. This perception both legitimizes and is legitimized by shorter races for women. Both structural constraints and micro level social interactions work together to reproduce the ideology of male physical superiority in distance running.

Interestingly, some runners felt that shorter races are entirely appropriate for women. They claimed that men should be required to run more due to their physiological advantage. Several of them stated that biological differences between men and women justify the difference in race distance. For instance, when asked if she is bothered by having to run shorter races, Jasmine responded: “no, it doesn’t bother me because I guess I just realized that guys are built differently than girls and I’ve kind of just accepted it.” Kayla responded to the same statement in a similar fashion: “No, cause I’m aware my fitness levels are equivalent to those of a grade nine boy. And it’s kind of...I mean we are different genders and you can’t....you can’t change that.” While she recognized that races for women are sexist, Kayla went on to state that men have physiological advantages in running which is presumably why their races are longer. Tara also

supported shorter races for women. When asked how she feels about the difference in race distances between men and women, she said:

I think it makes sense. I mean it's like a scientific fact that men can perform better than women at certain things and running is one of those things. I think that um...that's just a fact and if it were up to me I wouldn't change it. I think it works pretty well.

Several other runners also stated that men have more muscle mass, endurance and are better suited for distance running. They suggested that physiological differences have been scientifically proven and thus justify shorter races for women.

These comments suggest an internalization of beliefs about women's physical capabilities. Their dichotomization of gender, in which males are ascribed superiority, reflects dominant discourses that have traditionally placed limitations on women's athleticism. While men tend to have leaner builds, greater lung capacity and narrower hips which can help with running efficiency, scientific claims of male superiority in the sport are often fuzzier than recognized.

Science has yet to establish clear boundaries between the sexes, despite dominant discourse designating male and female as mutually exclusive categories. Biological sex is determined by a combination of hormonal, chromosomal, gonadal, genital and morphological features. These features can combine in a multitude of ways to produce bodies that are not clearly male or female (Preves 2003). It is thus difficult to identify any clear, scientifically proven boundary between the sexes, and consequently, even more difficult to establish that one sex possesses physical superiority. While the fastest men tend to outperform the fastest women in distance running, there is a great deal of overlap in race times. Further, as women's access to competitive opportunities has grown, their performances have steadily improved. For example,

women's marathon times have been improving at a faster rate than those of men to the extent that women's times may soon catch up with the times of the fastest men (Lorber 1992). The rapid improvement in race times that has accompanied women's access to growing access to training and competitive opportunities indicates that socially constructed elements play a role in the performance gap between men and women.

As Kane (1998) points out, sex appears to be located on a continuum, rather than in two distinct categories. Athletic performances also appear on a continuum, whereby the overlap in performance between the sexes is rendered visible (Kane 1998). Claims that men are unquestionably stronger or better suited for a particular athletic pursuit ignore evidence of this continuum, which is often rendered invisible through sex segregation and modified women's events in sports (Kane 1998). Forcing women to run shorter distances can obscure the existence of a performance continuum, in which there is considerable overlap between the sexes.

These findings suggest that an often uncritically accepted dominant discourse equating masculinity with athletic supremacy. Some respondents accepted the idea that men are faster and stronger than women without acknowledging an overlap in performance and the reality that some women run faster than many men. By internalizing beliefs about male athletic superiority without awareness of socially constructed elements that fuel this discourse, these athletes bodies are rendered docile.

In sum, shorter distances for women become normalized, setting limitations on women's athleticism and allowing the ideological connections between masculinity and athletic supremacy to prevail. Evidently, gender discrimination in sport has yet to be completely eradicated. While

many discriminatory practises have been challenged, sport continues to be structured in ways that privilege masculinity.

Sex Verification Testing

Sex verification testing in sport serves as another example of how sport is structured in ways that privilege masculinity. Several runners identified sex verification testing as an example of gender discrimination in their sport. A few of these specifically referenced Semenya's case as an example. While most runners had mixed feelings about sex testing in sport, the majority thought Semenya's case was unfair because testing was largely based on appearance.

Most runners abstained from taking a solid position on the issue and stated that there are valid reasons both for and against sex verification testing. Some supported the practice, suggesting that they have internalized gender dichotomization. These runners also stated that testing must be carried out in a sensitive and respectful way. Others stated that sex testing is sexist. Of the nineteen runners, five identified sex testing as sexist and four specifically identified Semenya's case as an example of sexism in distance running. Another five did not necessarily identify sex testing as sexist, but claimed that this practice reflects how gender ideals remain embedded in the sport. It was suggested that contradictions between athleticism (especially muscularity) and femininity are an important factor in the development of sex verification policies.

Muscularity and Femininity

Muscularity has historically been associated with masculinity. While female athleticism is becoming increasingly accepted and celebrated in mainstream media (Heywood & Dworkin 2003), excessive female muscularity remains stigmatized, especially in the absence of other

feminine markers. According to a number of runners, heavy musculature is unfeminine. Consequently, there is an incentive for female athletes to inhibit their muscular development. They may also display other visible markers of femininity.

Semenya's case provides a prime example of how heavy musculature is penalized among female athletes. The fact that musculature played a key role in Semenya's testing speaks volumes about how socially constructed gender ideals are reproduced through sport. Women who display too much athletic competence or who appear too muscular are seen as less feminine. Because Semenya did not display other visible markers of femininity, she was judged particularly harshly on her musculature and overall appearance. Her subsequent photoshoot for *You* magazine, in which Semenya donned makeup and feminine clothing, can be seen as an attempt to minimize negative publicity and emphasize her femininity. While Semenya denied having done the photoshoot in response to negative media attention, the timing of the shoot and the fashion she sported suggest an apologetic undertone.

Several runners claimed that sex testing is sexist because female athletes are penalized for being 'too good' or being 'too muscular'. Consequently, there is an unspoken implication that female runners cannot be too fast or too strong. Anna for instance, said "I find it like an insult or something. Like a girl can't be that good or something." Haley took a similar position. While discussing contradictions between athleticism and traditional definitions of femininity, Haley drew on Semenya's case as an example of how female muscularity is penalized. Haley explained the situation in the following way:

Looking at her, like, she is muscular so they associate that with being a male. But she's got to be male! She can't be that muscular if she's female! Exactly what is was. So yeah, that says a lot right there. That says a lot right there just saying 'oh, she has muscles, she can't be female. Females are thin. That's what I

feel the undertone of that was. Like how they called her out on that. So I don't think that's right.

Haley summed up our conversation by saying “she's too muscular and too fast to be female. So females can't be fast and they can't be muscular. Yup, says a lot!”

Several other runners also identified how traditional contradictions between femininity and muscularity can fuel the sex testing process. Michelle stated that “society, they expect girls not to look like that” (muscular). Megan shared a similar opinion:

People sort of have this image of a woman to not be as muscular as a male and I think that if they are, then society starts judging and starts putting this person into a category of either cheating or being of a different gender. Because society only has one image of a female and to have another is just like, crazy to them.

While having mixed feelings about sex verification testing, Nicole stated “it's just sexist to be like ‘well she's way more muscular, she wins every race, she has manly features.’”

Brittany claimed that sex verification testing is flawed in its reliance on physical appearance. She felt that appearance plays an important role in the sex verification process:

There are some girls that run as fast as what she was running but they weren't looking just at her performance, they were like ‘oh, she looks more like a guy, she looks like this, so she has to be tested.

Brittany was also particularly critical about the way Semenya's case was handled in terms of privacy and respect. She pointed out that the media was particularly hard on Semenya and that the IAAF should have taken steps to respect her privacy. Semenya was subjected to undue criticism about her body. Ellen felt that Semenya's appearance was harshly criticized not only by sporting authorities and the media, but also by other runners at her track club. She said:

I would go to a practice and at that time I was training with my track club in Mississauga and so it was back home, and I'd be like ‘have you heard the latest about this story? And people would be like ‘yeah’ and then they start listing all these rude adjectives to describe the poor girl and I'd be like ‘hey!’

Like Brittany and Ellen, Alyssa also felt that Semenya was subjected to harsh and unnecessary criticism about her body as a result of her heavy musculature. She summed up her feelings by saying: “I don’t think they should have made her private issues public.”

A few runners also noted that sex verification testing is problematic in that there is no equivalent testing for males. Women with a competitive edge are subject to intense scrutiny over their bodies while male athletes who excel are exempt from questions about elevated testosterone levels or unfair advantages. Alyssa, for example, stated that Semenya was targeted for testing based on her outstanding performance coupled with her appearance, which is something that would not happen to a male athlete. She said:

I think it’s just interesting...you think of Usain Bolt and how he obviously has....like there’s something different about him compared to everybody else? So I mean, like Caster, there’s something different about her too but because she’s...maybe because Usain Bolt is a guy...maybe he has more muscle mass or whatever and nobody tries to kick him out and nobody tries to be like ‘oh, you can’t be in the competition.’ But in her case she has more muscle mass and looks more like a guy I guess but they take her out of the competition because they think she doesn’t belong.

Here, Alyssa identified a double standard. Female athletic excellence can be penalized, while male athletic excellence is almost always celebrated. Unlike female athletes, male athletes are not scrutinized and deemed to have an ‘unfair’ advantage when they display feats of athletic supremacy.

Emily also discussed the problematic nature of sex testing. According to her, it is difficult to attribute genetic advantages purely to gender and even more difficult to accurately label an advantage as being unfair. She pointed out that there is no distinct line where one can identify a competitive advantage as being unfair, especially in terms of sex:

The line between male and female, there's no distinct line, so where do you say this is it and you have an advantage? Because, you know (teammate) definitely built better muscle than I did. She's genetically prone to doing that, right? So why is she not taken out because she has an advantage over me? Or, you know, me over someone who can't really run at all? So it's kind of this wacky grey area.

Emily correctly identified sex verification as problematic due to its arbitrary definition of 'unfair advantage'.

In sum, sex verification in sport operates in ways that covertly censor female athleticism and reinforce gender conformity. By using socially constructed standards to determine one's suitability to compete as a female, sporting authorities contribute to the marginalization of female athletes. Sex verification testing is thus oppressive and serves to uphold dominant associations between masculinity and athletic competence.

Appearance and Femininity

While some of the runners identified sex verification testing as sexist, they recognized that they are not directly affected by it because testing only occurs at the highest levels of competition. That being said, associations between muscularity and masculinity were identified as something that has affected some of them to some degree. Several runners claimed to have been subject to comments about their musculature. They also stated that female runners with a lot of visible muscle can be subjected to gossip or negative comments. Overall, it seemed that female runners are expected to monitor their appearance more closely than male runners.

Anna was among those who felt that female runners are expected to project a feminine image. She stated that her experiences with gender ideals in running were centered on the perception that women should be 'pretty'. She felt a need to control her appearance while running, especially in terms of facial expression. She said

I think one thing is I used to be concerned about how I looked like running, kind of. Like at the end of races, I feel like guys just let go so much. It doesn't matter what their face looks like. But for me, it's always kind of at the back of my mind. I think just as a girl you always have to....like there's so many people. Everyone is looking at you.

Anna pointed out that while competing in grueling cross country races, men are not judged negatively for pained facial expressions or having phlegm or mucus on their faces. Females would be judged negatively for such an appearance, especially if caught on camera. She stated “guys have like drool or spit, like it's just so different! But if you see a girl like that, it's a different reaction like ‘eww! What are they doing?!’” Anna explained that males are supposed to be tough. So consequently, it is considered acceptable for them to display pain in competition through contorted facial expressions and visible mucus. As a female, however, Anna perceived a need to control her facial expressions sufficiently for it to interfere with her concentration during races. When racing, she would sometimes feel compelled to direct some of her energy towards maintaining an acceptable appearance instead of focusing 100 percent on her performance. She summed up her thoughts as follows:

With guys it's like they're tough. They're supposed to push themselves as much as they can and I think that's kind of held me back a couple of times. You don't want to lose control of yourself or something.

Others also felt that women are sometimes judged in terms of muscularity. Haley claimed that within her particular running community, it was common for comments to be made about female athletes being “too muscular”, although noting that this trend pertains more to sprinters than distance runners. Haley said “I've heard a lot of men say stuff like ‘oh that's gross’ or ‘too muscular’.” Haley also stated that comments about weight and body size were commonplace within her training circle and that both men and women could become targets of such comments.

Haley also discussed comments made about her own body. She explained that as she became involved in competitive running, her legs became larger and more muscular. She also gained muscle tone in her abdomen which elicited disapproval from her boyfriend. Haley explained that she became very lean after her first year of competitive running and while she felt as though her body finally fit into the ideal image of an elite runner, her boyfriend did not like the changes to her body. She said “I was really fit and had a really fit stomach. I had a six pack and my boyfriend did not like it. He thought it was too much.” Although she had developed an ideal body for competitive running, Haley felt as though her increased muscle tone were at odds with conventional understandings of femininity.

Like Haley, Kara also claimed that comments would sometimes be levelled at runners with heavy musculature, although not necessarily in a negative context. She said:

people have just been like ‘whoa, you are so strong!’ Or some people have very strong legs and you can see that. Like at school, there’s a group of runners that went to high school with me through high school, and some of us have very noticeably strong legs. And people are like ‘whoa, whoa, whoa!’ But again, it’s kind of just stating the facts. Nothing negative.

While Kara did not perceive such comments to be negative, they did sometimes make her uncomfortable:

Sometimes I don’t like that. Sometimes I’m self conscious about that. But at the end of the day, I look like this because I’m a runner and I love to run, so I wouldn’t want to change that.

Nicole also talked about comments made about strong, muscular female runners. In her competitive circle, people would sometimes comment on visibly muscular women. She identified associations between female muscularity and perceived lesbianism. She said “people, like, sort of make comments about sort of really muscular and like, strong, not very feminine girls.” She emphasized, though, that negative comments like that are not commonplace. Nicole

also explained that successful female runners are often complimented in ways that promote a masculine image. Strong, successful female runners might be called a “tank” or a “beast” which as Nicole pointed out, are things that “normally, women wouldn’t want to hear about themselves.”

Megan also discussed the relationship between femininity and muscularity, although unlike Nicole, Kara and Haley, her experiences were different. For her, contradictions between muscularity and femininity helped guide her sporting pursuits. As a multisport athlete prior to joining her university cross country and track teams, her decision to focus exclusively on running stemmed from the positive reaction she received from running versus other sports. She used to play hockey; a sport she described as masculine. Running is more consistent with feminine ideals, thus allowing her to enjoy more social rewards. Megan felt that playing hockey rendered her less feminine which helped fuel her decision to pursue running as her primary sport. She discussed how hockey is seen as a ‘butch’ sport for women. When comparing the two sports, Megan said “running I think...it’s more feminine because of the attire and the body types associated with running. They aren’t as muscular and stuff.”

I feel as though when I played hockey, like, I would consider myself sort of like a butch. Like I was becoming...just because of what society says..like you can’t have muscle if you’re a girl.. I was becoming, just the environment of playing hockey, like I was becoming sort of like, into this other gendered category and I think that’s actually a factor why I stopped playing. I felt like I was losing some of my femininity.

For Megan, hockey promotes muscular growth, which gives it a masculine quality, whereas the body type associated with distance running is slimmer and more feminine. She also described team environments in hockey as “loud” and “male”. She received more positive attention from

her involvement in running compared to hockey and suggested that this could be related to the fact that running is more consistent with feminine ideals.

Paradoxically, while running is a sport that tends to promote bodily reduction, it can also promote muscularity, a quality associated with masculinity. Shared associations between muscularity and masculinity can create tensions for female athletes. Megan, for instance, chose to focus on running partially as a means to distance herself from masculinising aspects of hockey. Haley felt as though her muscular abdomen conflicted with dominant feminine ideals when her boyfriend told her it was “too much.” Interestingly, Haley felt that while her body defied conventional femininity, she simultaneously achieved an ideal body for competitive running. She stated that during this period, she was in the best shape of her life and running faster than ever before. The fact that her athletic success was coupled with critical scrutiny over her body provoked Haley’s awareness of how muscularity and femininity are constructed in opposition to one another. In sum, the stories told by some of the runners indicate that constructed gender ideals continue to affect the experiences of female runners.

Medical Surveillance

Historically, female runners have been subjected to heightened medical surveillance (Mewett 2003). As women gained access to competitive running opportunities during the early twentieth century, they were simultaneously subjected to medical scrutiny, including medical exams before competitions, as well as periodic examinations throughout their training (Mewett 2003). Although heightened medical surveillance for female athletes is rationalized as a means to protect their health and maximize their competitive potential, it can also be seen as a covert way to regulate women. It also constitutes a form of patriarchal micro-power through which runners

are subjected to subtle forms of management and regulation executed largely by male authority figures, such as coaches or athletic officials⁴.

Medical surveillance of female runners is a trend that has continued into the twenty-first century, albeit in less overt forms. A number of runners reported that coaches discuss medical issues with women more than men. Some had coaches who have imposed mandatory blood-work tests than applied only to female runners. The rationale for this is that female runners are supposedly more prone to iron deficiencies than male runners. While a few runners described such tests as a gendered aspect of their sport, the surveillance was not experienced as overbearing. While both male and female athletes are required to undergo a standard medical examination in order to compete in any varsity sport at a Canadian university, it was stated that coaches sometimes impose additional measures to monitor the health of female athletes.

Megan suggested that mandatory blood tests not only help ensure the health and well-being of athletes, but also allow the competitive potential of each athlete to be maximized. She pointed out that coaches put time and money into their athletes, and consequently they want to ensure each runner can perform to their full potential. As with a number of other runners, Megan uncritically reported how coaches specifically monitor the health of female athletes. In her opinion, women who do not obtain adequate nutrition while running competitively can suffer long term health effects, including reproductive failure:

I think that coaches have been trained, I think. Now that they have seen women suffer and not be able to have children and stuff like that, I feel like coaches

⁴ While it is important to note the presence of female coaches and officials in the sport of distance running, authority figures within the sport have predominantly been male and the sport can thus be said to have been developed from an androcentric perspective. Consequently, Mewett (2003) refers to such regulation as 'patriarchal'.

have been more educated now to manage their athletes' health. Specifically women.

Although research suggests that female athletes are especially prone to iron deficiencies (Bass & McClung 2012; Beard & Tobin 2000; Rowland 2012), their heightened surveillance by coaches may also suggest an element of paternalism. Historically, claims of physical vulnerability have been used to rationalize the excessive surveillance of female athletes. Medical claims that vigorous exercise is harmful to women have since been disproven; however, the continual focus on the nutritional statuses of female athletes can be seen as a subtle surveillance mechanism. While medical surveillance is executed for the purpose of proactive health care, the targeting of female athletes for surveillance may be connected to vestige beliefs that women are frail and in need of protection. Instead of governing their own health, female athletes cede control of their health to coaches.

It was also suggested that coaches sometimes display more concern for female runners with physical ailments. Anna claimed that male coaches would sometimes display more sympathy for female runners. When asked if she had ever witnessed sexism in her sport, she responded:

I think so. Like with coaches sometimes, I think girls tend to get more sympathy from coaches even. Like if a girl is complaining of a stomach ache, they might not have to do a workout, whereas if a guy [does], it's like 'you're a guy, suck it up! Like get tough!'

Anna stated, however, that such sympathy is generally only extended by male coaches. She said "I noticed that with guy coaches and then when we finally had a woman coach she was more like 'no'. Strict." Anna's observations support the hypothesis that the heightened corporeal surveillance of female runners continue to linger in Canadian university cross country and track.

Moreover, the fact that male coaches are the ones displaying such leniency suggests a paternalistic element present in the relationship between male coaches and female athletes.

As discussed in Chapter Three, there is also a tendency for coaches to attend to diet and weight issues with female runners. For instance, Mia's coach closely monitored the weight of his athletes and required them to submit dietary logs detailing everything the runners had eaten within a given timeframe. Mia explained that her coaches involvement in matters of diet and weight was simply to ensure the health and well-being of his athletes and she did not find his surveillance overbearing. Michelle also observed a tendency for coaches to monitor the weight of female runners:

At least our coaches are more cautious towards the girls in terms of eating and stuff because they think girls are more likely to develop eating disorders. So they're very careful with like, making sure we're not losing weight, whereas if a guy on the team were to lose weight, they don't care.

It was suggested by several runners that heightened corporeal surveillance from coaches stems from the fact that there is such a high prevalence of eating disorders among female distance runners.

Ultimately, it appears that the heightened surveillance of female athletes is a trend that continues today within university distance running. Corporeal regulatory techniques, such as mandatory blood work policies, involvement in matters of diet and weight, as well as increased attention paid to their physical complaints, all work to create an environment of heightened surveillance for female runners.

Heightened medical surveillance from coaches may suggest that women need an authority figure to take command of their health, rather than being able to do so themselves. As suggested by some of the runners, however, coaches are knowledgeable about the health

consequences of nutritional deficiencies and also want to maximize the competitive potential of their athletes. Consequently, they may be justified in executing a certain degree of medical involvement. However, the heightened medical surveillance of female runners reflects a long tradition of women's corporeal regulation in sport. The degree of surveillance they are exposed to can be understood as a means by which traditional gender ideals continue to infiltrate the sport.

Conclusion

While no longer deemed unfit for vigorous physical activity, there are subtle ways in which female runners continue to face heightened regulation, resulting in their secondary status in the sport. Female runners are still restricted to shorter races, face heightened corporeal scrutiny and at the highest levels of competition, are subjected to sex verification testing. While justified as a means to preserve fair competition and the health of athletes, these surveillance practices help preserve traditional associations between femininity and physical deficiency. Arguably, these practices can be seen as a subtle continuation of the *female frailty myth*, which assumes that the female body is bound by physical limitations to which the male body is exempt. Ultimately, the heightened surveillance and regulation of female runners helps sustain the superior status of men's running.

Chapter Five – Discussion and Conclusion

Employing Foucault's work on self-regulation and governmentality, distance running subcultures provide a useful site for examining how dominant discourses on gender and the body are reproduced. Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies' provides a particularly salient approach to understanding how self-surveillance is embedded in the structure and subculture of women's distance running. My interviews with nineteen female CIS cross country and track athletes reveal how numerous surveillance mechanisms promote dominant ideals on gender and the body within their athletic environments.

In his 1975 work *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses the shift from penal repression to disciplinary power in Europe between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Until the late eighteenth century, social order was largely maintained through penal repression. Punishment was localized in the body of the convict, and public torture was employed as a means by which sovereign powers sought control over subjects. Crime was seen as a direct assault on the sovereign which justified public torture and execution. According to Foucault, this process functioned as "a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereign is reconstituted" (1975:48). Public displays of torture allowed the sovereign to reassert power that has been undermined by crime.

Foucault argues that as public torture disappeared, new forms of surveillance replaced cruel and less effective physical punishment. Capitalism required disciplined bodies. Thus, surveillance facilitated the rise of capitalism, the new economic order. The rise of surveillance instilled in the population the qualities necessary for the functioning of capitalism. While some have attributed the abolishment of torture to human enlightenment and progress, Foucault suggests that penal reforms were merely a reflection of the economic and social changes of the

era. These reforms provided a means to assert greater control over large populations, and ultimately, to bolster capitalist objectives.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, various reforms to the penal system took place (Foucault 1975). Penal repression was replaced by what Foucault calls ‘disciplinary power’; a form of social control rooted in regimentation and self-regulation. Rather than focusing on punishment, disciplinary power aims to influence behaviour through subtle surveillance techniques. This surveillance pervades all social institutions and targets the body as the locus of power, ultimately promoting self-regulation (Foucault 1975; Markula & Pringle 2006:39). Because it is subtle, Foucault argues that surveillance often goes undetected, permitting it to become normalized. Individuals internalize the surveillance to which they are exposed and become self-regulating. Foucault refers to these self-regulating bodies as ‘docile bodies.’

Docile bodies result from exposure to disciplinary techniques such as repetitive exercises and manipulation involving the use of space, time and architecture (Markula & Pringle 2006). A disciplined body not only responds to disciplinary techniques, but also does so efficiently (Foucault 1975). A ‘docile body’ is “well-disciplined, economically efficient and politically obedient” (Markula & Pringle 2006:40). These bodies become “subjected and practiced” through continual exposure to surveillance mechanisms (Foucault 1975:137-138). Once self-regulating, such bodies can be said to be ‘docile’.

Sport and exercise constitute forms of disciplinary practice through which docile bodies are shaped. Different exercise techniques produce different body types suited to particular sports, or particular cultural ideals. Markula and Pringle (2006) assert that disciplinary technologies can

produce a multitude of bodies within a fitness context. They further state that coaching strategies can help sustain particular body types within specific sporting environments. This is clearly visible in women's distance running, where coaches engage in numerous practices that encourage leanness. Disciplinary technologies in sport, such as drills, skill sessions, fitness programs, punitive measures, and general surveillance can help create mould bodies to fit into a particular athletic setting (Markula & Pringle 2006). In short, the highly regimented nature of athletic training renders sport a particularly efficient way to promote docility.

Distance running provides an exceptionally efficient way to produce docility since it is a sport that requires a great deal of self-regulation and discipline in order to achieve success. The sport is also marked by surveillance practices that permeate deep inside the sport's subculture. Strong links between thinness and success create a culture of surveillance and self-regulation within the sport. These links are particularly pronounced in women's distance running. Many runners tend to develop preoccupations with weight. Pressures to be thin prompt runners to compare their bodies and diets to those of other runners, creating a culture of surveillance within the sport. This culture operates in a covert fashion, whereby individuals (often subconsciously) engage in self-regulation and surveillance of others. Women involved in competitive distance running come to exemplify docility.

There are also other ways in which distance running promotes dominant discourses on gender. A variety of surveillance mechanisms restrict women's running and perpetuate the ideology of male physical superiority. Sex verification policies and shorter distances for women's races provide clear examples of such mechanisms. Because surveillance has long been entrenched in the culture of the sport, it has become normalized to a degree that many female runners have difficulty recognizing discriminatory practices as problematic. While some runners

were able to identify sexist practices, many expressed mixed feelings about the influence of gender in their sport. Many athletes were not bothered by the sexist practices they identified, and others did not recognize the same practices as sexist. Only a few were assertive in their disapproval of gendered practices such as sex testing and shorter races for women. The ambivalence demonstrated by many female runners portrays women's distance running as a niche that is ripe for the production of docile bodies.

Body Image

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is substantial pressure among runners to maintain a thin, lean physique. This is particularly true for female runners who face performance-based pressures to maintain a lean appearance, in addition to general societal pressures celebrating leanness. The runners claimed that the pressure they feel to be thin is largely rooted in performance; however, most also expressed desire to maintain a lean appearance for other reasons. Several expressed a desire to fit into running clothes and to look good in them.

The interview data is consistent with claims that body image anxiety tends to be more pronounced in leanness-promoting sports (Swami et al. 2009). Weight is indeed a central feature of the sport's subculture. Food and weight were frequent topics of conversation. Weight was monitored by coaches and peers, and there was a common belief that weight-loss improves performance. The importance attributed to leanness within the sport's subculture prompts heightened self-awareness of dietary habits and weight. Athletes feel heightened pressure to eat and strive for leanness when surrounded by fellow runners and coaches. Self-surveillance and surveillance of others plays a key role in promoting thinness as a desirable trait and in keeping weight a central part of the sport's subculture.

Gender

Despite recent gains in women's sport, there are ways in which constructed gender ideals continue to diminish female athletes. Although women today are able to participate in competitive running, there are subtle ways in which female distance runners remain subjected to heightened surveillance and regulation. In CIS cross country, women's races are limited to five kilometres; half the distance run by men. Women also face heightened medical surveillance and corporeal scrutiny from coaches. At the highest levels of competition, women are sometimes forced to undergo sex verification testing. While justified as promoting the interests of female athletes, structural and cultural practices within the sport perpetuate traditional associations between frailty and femininity. As Lorber (1992) states, modifying women's sporting events suggests that they are incapable of abiding by the same regulations as males. In distance running, forcing women to run shorter races implies that they are less capable of running longer races. Modifying women's sporting events and micro-managing their health is paternalistic and suggests that women's bodies are in need of increased regulation. Although the state of affairs for female runners has vastly improved, surveillance mechanisms within the sport create a subtle continuation of the female frailty myth.

The 'Feminine Apologetic'

As discussed above, female athletes sometimes engage in overt displays of femininity in order to counter the perceived masculinity they display through athleticism. This process, referred to as 'the feminine apologetic', deflects negative stereotyping and allows female athletes to enjoy social rewards attached to gender conformity. While the 'feminine apologetic' has been identified as prevalent among female athletes competing in contact sports, there is very little research examining this concept in the context of sports like running. Most athletes in this study

did not express overt concern about maintaining a feminine image. All claimed to embrace their athleticism and on the surface dismissed concerns about appearing feminine. One theme was that running promotes a feminine image due to its conduciveness to bodily reduction. On the other hand, athletes shared information indicating that they do indeed engage in apologetic behaviour. Anna, for instance, was particularly concerned with ‘being nice’, which she identified as a key marker of femininity. As discussed in Chapter Three, Anna revealed that she feels bad passing her teammates in races because she does not want to be seen as overly competitive. She claimed that competitiveness is associated with masculinity while ‘being nice’ is associated with femininity. Consequently, she feels compelled to show consideration for her teammates by not being overly competitive with them.

Anna also discussed post-race handshakes in relation to gender. She claimed that although both male and female runners will often shake hands after a race, this custom is compulsory for women. She stated that there is a greater expectation for female runners to congratulate each other after races. She also claimed that post-race handshakes are also more genuine among women, which may seem counterintuitive given their compulsory nature.

Such observations clearly reveal apologetic undertones. Even at an elite level of competition a desire to be ‘nice’ (real feminine) was so strong that performance was compromised. This finding is consistent with research indicating that pressure to uphold a feminine image causes female athletes to engage in apologetic behaviours (Broad, 2001; Davis-Delano 2009; Dworkin 2004; Caudwell, 2003; Krane et al. 2004; Roth & Basow 2002). In Anna’s case, a desire to appear feminine was strong enough to hinder performance.

Social pressure to appear feminine, it seems, can place limitations on female athleticism. As Dworkin (2004) suggests, cultural constructions of feminine beauty can actually help shape exercise regimens and ultimately, the muscular strength of women. In short, Dworkin states that the feminine apologetic may inhibit women's muscular development. In the context of running, social conventions surrounding gender can inhibit female athletes and prevent them from achieving their full potential. As a result, associations between masculinity and athletic dominance are strengthened.

Similarly, there were efforts to control appearance while running. There was a gendered self-consciousness about facial expressions during races. Again, by discipline of facial expressions there was not 100 percent focus on the race. Male athletes are able to "let go" during races, while women make an effort to control their appearance in order to avoid judgement from others.

The 'feminine apologetic' was also evident in a former hockey player's decision to focus exclusively on being a runner. Running is more consistent with femininity than hockey. Thus, shaping athletic pursuits to match feminine ideals is another feature of apologetic behaviour. Consistent with previous research, some runners do their hair and paint their nails before competitions. Sprinters seemed particularly apt to do this. Since distance running is consistent with femininity in its promotion of bodily reduction while sprinting is characterized by the masculine qualities of speed and power, it makes sense for apologetic behaviour to be more common among sprinters. Although wanting to look good does not necessarily mean athletes are engaging in the feminine apologetic, doing one's hair and nails before a competition is apologetic behaviour. Another athlete discussed how her sport is changing to incorporate femininity. She specifically pointed to the advent of the skort, a running garment that consists of

a skirt with shorts underneath. It was stated that this garment allows women to maintain a feminine appearance while running.

In sum, while there were claims dismissing concerns about appearing feminine, there was also a need to monitor and control behaviour to match feminine ideals. In doing so they engaged in ‘the feminine apologetic’. While adopting a feminine image does not necessarily indicate an apologetic connection since many women do this regardless of athletic involvement, the comments by these athletes suggest that some runners take specific measure to uphold a feminine appearance.

Internalized Docility

Despite claims to the contrary, the runners internalized dominant ideals surrounding gender and the body. Even athletes who claimed to be unaffected by pressures to be thin or appear feminine made statements suggesting that they were indeed affected by such pressures. For example, there was a tendency for athletes to contradict themselves by initially stating they are unaffected by gender and subsequently providing examples of how they conform to dominant ideals on gender and the body. This can be seen as an indication of internalized docility in that many athletes seemed unaware of how gender affects their sport until taking the time to reflect on their experiences.

For example, claims that running is affected by gender norms and even arguments that gender stereotypes seem to be eroding co-existed with expressions of concerns with shorter races for men in CIS cross country. Similarly, runners who claimed to be unaffected by gender norms later opined that sex testing is sexist and that muscular unfeminine (female) bodies may be judged harshly. Thus, athletes who did not initially identify gender as having a profound effect on their experiences also volunteered examples of gendered practices in their sport. Such

contradictions may be linked to the feminist backlash that continues to linger in Western society (Hatten & Trautner 2012; Kanner & Anderson 2010). There is a level of stigma associated with feminism that encourages apologetic behaviour and prompts individuals to distance themselves from adopting a feminist identity. Indeed, the disclaimer that they ‘are not a feminist’ was present in the responses given by some participants. It’s possible that over-emphasizing the erosion of gender stereotypes in their sport may be a way for participants to distance themselves from negative associations with feminism.

By providing contradictory statements, participants also highlighted the subtle nature of disciplinary power. As Foucault (1975) asserts, surveillance mechanisms operate covertly which promotes self-regulation and permits dominant discourses to become normalized. The way in which gender was initially described as something that does not affect them reveals the covert nature of control, as described by Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary societies. It was only upon deeper reflection that some of the athletes were able to identify gender as a factor that shapes their experiences as runners, which exposes the power of gender discourse.

Runners also discussed body image in contradictory ways. They all agreed that body image is a concern among female runners. Most claimed they were affected by pressure to be thin to a certain degree, but also said they were unaffected by it. Thus, despite claiming to ignore pressure to be thin, conversations about food and exercise suggested compliance towards the thin ideal. Athletes claiming to be relatively unconcerned about body image also reported that discussions about food among teammates have affected their own dietary habits. Runners claiming to be happy with their weight also said that an advantage of being a runner is being able to eat more. Such statements suggest internalization of dominant discourse mandating thinness for women and compliance with the broader discourse of health and fitness. Compliance was

also evident in an expressed desire to look good in running apparel. Running reinforces the imperative to lose weight, especially among runners with visible excess fat.

The runners internalized dominant ideals mandating thinness for women. Their comments identify excess body fat as something that runners seek to avoid, suggesting an aesthetic component to the pressure they feel to be thin. The contradictory statements indicate the degree to which the thin ideal has become normalized within their athletic subculture. Many runners made statements suggesting compliance towards this ideal without even being aware that they were doing so. This suggests that they have internalized the dominant ideal of thinness and have thus become ‘docile bodies.’ The manner in which many runners attributed pressure to be thin to ‘themselves’ further highlights the covert nature of surveillance practices promoting this ideal. While the runners experienced pressure from a variety of external sources, many stated that they ultimately put pressure on themselves to be thin, thereby demonstrating internalized docility.

Empowerment

Despite pressure to conform to idealizations of thinness and femininity, the runners overwhelmingly identified their sport as a site of empowerment. Even the runners with negative experiences described running as something that has shaped their lives in a positive way overall. They listed specific areas of empowerment, including social support, travel opportunities, access to scholarships, free clothes, and connections to job opportunities. They described their team as being very close knit, where strong friendships develop between athletes. The development of self-discipline, which translates into success in other areas, was also described as a benefit of their involvement. A sense of being healthful and feeling athletically accomplished were also

mentioned. The way running was described by these athletes supports the literature claiming that athletic participation provides a multitude of benefits.

Although the term ‘docile body’ implies passivity, the runners were not passive subjects who conformed unequivocally to cultural ideals. Instead, their descriptions highlight the pressures that exist in their athletic milieus and their responses to these pressures. It should be noted that while many of the participants described ways in which they were influenced by pressures surrounding body image and gender, they also resisted these pressures at times. Runners with muscular builds continued to train. Runners whose coaches commented on their weight took pride in their athletic accomplishments. There was also a common understanding that the idealization of thinness is largely irrational. Those who described athleticism as being associated with masculinity all chose to continue running. Ultimately, the runners’ love for their sport trumped any pressures they felt to conform to cultural ideals in ways that interfered with their participation. So while there was certainly a degree of conformity described, there were also ways in which they actively shaped their own experiences as runners.

Conclusion

This study has examined the experiences of nineteen female distance runners competing in varsity cross country and track at Canadian universities. The interview data revealed that despite the substantial progress of women’s sport, there are still ways in which hegemonic gender ideals remain embedded in the structure and subculture of competitive distance running. Shorter distances for women’s races, heightened corporeal surveillance and sex verification testing constitute the most poignant ways in which gender continues to affect the experiences of female distance runners. The interview data also revealed that distance running subcultures perpetuate the dominant discourse mandating thinness for women. Competitive distance running

was identified as a site that intensifies societal pressure for women to be thin. Ultimately, it was revealed that dominant discourses on gender and the body are replicated within distance running subcultures.

Surveillance practices were identified as central to the reproduction of hegemonic gender ideals and the pursuit of thinness within the sport. Surveillance from coaches, athletes and spectators all contribute to the reproduction of these discourses. Additionally, athletes engage in self-surveillance to regulate their corporeal practices according dominant ideals on gender and the body. As individuals internalize the surveillance mechanisms and become self-regulating, docile bodies are produced and dominant discourses are replicated.

Limitations of the Study

Participant homogeneity presents a major limitation to this study. All participants identified themselves as Caucasian and heterosexual. Most participants also came from middle class backgrounds. The demographic composition of my participants likely played a role in determining the content of the interviews. For example, the social location of each participant likely influenced the responses given, and ultimately, the direction the interviews took. The results of this study are therefore only applicable to the small group of runners interviewed. Participant homogeneity (and also the qualitative nature of the study) means that findings are not generalizable.

It was revealed during the interviews that women's university distance running in Canada tends to be predominantly Caucasian. While there are some racial minorities who compete in the sport, participants noted that these women seem to be few and far between in their competitive arenas. It was also stated that this lack of diversity seems to be concentrated in the distance events in women's athletics. Further research is needed in order to understand these

demographic trends. So while the homogeneity of my research presents a major limitation, it also raises important questions and invites possibilities for future research.

Recommendations for Further Study

Additional research is needed in order to further understand interconnections between athletics, surveillance and corporeal discourses. For instance, the lack of participant diversity in the present study raises interesting questions about racial segregation in sport. A similar study involving a more diverse participant group allow for an understanding of how race, gender, sexuality and class intersect within the subculture of athletics. In short, greater participant diversity would facilitate a multifaceted analysis of the present subject matter and could lead to new insights pertaining to racial segregation in athletics.

It would be useful to broaden the scope of the present study by incorporating an analysis of other track and field events, such as sprints, throws and jumps, in addition to distance running. Including male as well as female research subjects could also yield interesting findings on the relationship between athletics and the production of gender. An in-depth examination of track and field that includes other events in the realm of athletics will not only yield greater opportunity to obtain a more diverse participant group, but would also provide a more complete understanding of gender and embodiment in the context of competitive sport. An ideal approach would be to study the ways in which gender, sexuality and embodiment impact athletes involved in various track and field events, such as sprints, throws, jumps and distance running. Comparing different events will allow for an interrogation of how athletes experience cultural conventions on sex, gender and the body differently, depending on how their bodies are employed for competition. Such a study would yield great potential for understanding the production of cultural discourses on gender, sexuality and the body through athletic subcultures.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

1. What is your age?
2. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
3. What is your racial or ethnic identification?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. What are your parents' occupations?
6. How long have you been involved in running?
7. What drew you to the sport? What do you like about it?
8. Are you involved or have you been involved in any other sports?
9. Is being an athlete an important part of your identity? Do you identify strongly as an athlete? If so, why?
10. How would you define femininity? What characteristics do you feel constitute femininity?
11. Do you feel like aspects of conventional definitions of femininity conflict with your personal understandings of femininity?
12. Do you see yourself as projecting a feminine image?
13. Do you ever feel like athleticism and femininity are constructed in opposition to one another according to conventional ideals?
14. Do you feel like there is a relationship between running and feminine ideals? For example, do you feel like running can help promote a feminine image? Or does it have the opposite affect? Or is there no relationship at all between running and femininity?
15. Do you ever feel like you've been affected by traditional gender ideals in relation to your involvement in distance running?
16. Do you ever feel like you've been exposed to sexism or discrimination in the context of distance running?
17. Have you ever witnessed homophobia in any form in relation to your involvement with running?
18. Have you ever witnessed racism while participating in your sport?

19. Do you ever feel constrained by traditional gender ideals in your sport? For instance, are you bothered by shorter distances in women's races compared to men's?
20. Do you experience sport as a site of constraint in any way? If so, how?
21. Do you feel pressure to conform to a certain body image?
22. Do you feel that there is pressure for you as a distance runner to be thin?
23. Is body size something that is talked about within your training circle? If so, how is it discussed?
24. Is diet discussed within your peer group or with your coaches? If so, what kinds of things are talked about?
25. Do you feel like your participation in competitive running provides you with a source of status or prestige?
26. Are there any privileges associated with being a competitive distance runner? If so, what are they?
27. Do you experience your sport as a site of empowerment in any way? If so, how is your athletic involvement empowering?

Appendix B – Recruiting Form

COVER LETTER FOR PARTICIPANT TO BE WRITTEN ON MCMASTER UNIVERISTY
LETTERHEAD

GENDER: EMBODIMENT AND SELF-REGULATION: SURVEILLANCE IN FEMALE DISTANCE
RUNNING SUBCULTURES

Dear potential participant:

I am a graduate student in the Sociology Department here at McMaster and in partial fulfillment of my MA in Sociology; I am conducting research on the cultural dimensions of women's distance running. More specifically, I am researching the relationship between women's middle distance running and cultural conventions relating to the body, gender and sexuality. I am seeking volunteer research participants who would be willing to be interviewed on a range of topics relating to gender ideals, body image and empowerment in the context of competitive distance running subcultures.

Traditionally, sport has been constructed as a masculine domain, which has led to the marginalization of female athletes. While female athletes continue to be denied the same prestige and opportunities afforded to male athletes, the past century has witnessed monumental gains for the advancement of women's sport thus leading some women to experience sport more as a site of empowerment than a site of marginalization. Although athleticism has traditionally been associated with masculinity, there are a number of factors that provide female athletes with sources of empowerment. For instance, the value placed on competitiveness in capitalist societies provides male and female athletes alike with a source of prestige. Additionally, given that running fosters thinness, a trait highly valued in contemporary Western culture, being a runner could provide women with a source of social status.

The aim of my research is to investigate how conflicting cultural values shape the experiences of female distance runners in relation to gender and embodiment. In order to achieve this objective, I plan on holding interviews with female distance runners over the next few months. The interviews will be approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length. Athletes, this is your chance to let people know what it is like to be a competitive female distance runner at a Canadian university in 2011! As a token of appreciation for taking part in this study, participants will be given a Tim Horton's gift card valued at ten dollars. Although I would appreciate your participation, I have a number of potential avenues for getting participants for my study, and therefore you shouldn't feel badly if you would prefer not to be involved.

If you would like to have further information about this study or think you may be interested in participating, I can be reached by email at careyco.univmail.cis@mcmaster.ca or careys45@hotmail.com or by phone at (289) 489-0745. Any reply would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely;

Christine Carey
Department of Sociology
McMaster University
careyco@mcmaster.ca

Appendix C – Informed Consent Form

COVER LETTER FOR PARTICIPANT TO BE WRITTEN ON MCMASTER UNIVERISTY
LETTERHEAD

GENDER: EMBODIMENT AND SELF-REGULATION: SURVEILLANCE IN FEMALE DISTANCE
RUNNING SUBCULTURES

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Study about:

Gender and Distance Running

Principal Investigator:

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IWC 208
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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine how the athletic experiences of female middle distance runners are shaped by cultural conventions in relation to the body, sport, gender and sexuality. Traditionally, sport has been constructed as a masculine domain, which has lead to the marginalization of female athletes. While female athletes continue to be denied the same prestige and opportunities afforded to male athletes, the past century has witnessed monumental gains for the advancement of women's sport thus leading some women to experience sport more as a site of empowerment than a site of marginalization. Although athleticism has traditionally been associated with masculinity, there are a number of factors that provide female athletes with

sources of empowerment. For instance, the value placed on competitiveness in the Western world provides male and female athletes alike with a source of prestige. Additionally, given that running fosters thinness, a trait highly valued in contemporary Western culture, being a runner could provide women with a source of social status.

I would like to investigate how female distance runners feel about social conventions sanctioning thinness among women and whether or not they perceive a presence of these ideals in their athletic environments. I would also like to learn whether or not traditional gender ideals still have the power to influence how female middle distance runners experience their sport. My project will investigate how numerous cultural ideals shape the experiences of female distance runners in relation to their bodies, their gender and their sexualities.

Procedures involved in the Research

This study involves the use of face-to-face interviews in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of female middle distance runners. Should you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to provide some demographic information, as well as discuss your experiences as a distance runner in relation to traditional gender ideals, embodiment and empowerment. You will be asked to describe whether or not you experience sport as a site of empowerment and prestige and your perceptions of competitive distance running as a status marker for women. You will also be asked to describe the gendered aspects of sports that you experience (if any), such as experiences of sexism or gender stereotyping. You will also be asked questions pertaining to body image in association with your sport, such as whether or not certain body images are idealized within the running subculture. Among other things, you will also be asked to identify whether or not you have ever witnessed any instances of homophobia experienced through your sport. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. Because this study deals with some sensitive issues surrounding gender discrimination and body image, there is a possibility that the interview may evoke negative feelings or memories. However, you need not answer any questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. Although I will make every effort to exclude information that might identify you in my reported findings, it is important to note that we are often recognizable in the stories we tell and the references we make. Please keep this in mind during the interview.

Potential Benefits

Although the research will not benefit you directly, it will contribute to the body of knowledge on gender and sport; a topic that is currently underrepresented in Canadian scholarship. The knowledge derived from this research will help provide insight into the lived experiences of female middle distance runners in relation to various cultural discourses.

Confidentiality

Please note that if you choose to participate in this study you will be granted full confidentiality and anonymity. In order to protect your identity, you will be given the option of selecting a pseudonym. Additionally, I will avoid including any other identifying information in my final paper.

For example, I will not divulge the university from which I obtained my research subjects. No one except myself and my thesis committee (Dr. Phil White, Dr. Nancy Bouchier and Dr. James Gillett) will view the data. The data will be stored in a secure location where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed, any voice recordings will be destroyed.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not.

Although I would appreciate your participation, I have a number of potential avenues for obtaining participants for my study, and therefore you shouldn't feel badly if you would prefer not to be involved. If you decide to be part of the study, you can decide to stop (withdraw), at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still take part in the study.

Information about the Study Results

I expect to have this study completed by September of 2012. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact me.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Office of Research Services

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Christine Carey of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____: