

**Running the routes together: co-running and  
knowledge in action**

**Jacquelyn Allen Collinson, BA, PhD**

**Qualitative Research Unit  
School of Sport & Health Sciences  
University of Exeter  
St Luke's Campus  
Exeter  
Devon EX1 4LU  
UK**

**Telephone: 00 44 1302 264759  
Email: [J.AllenCollinson@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:J.AllenCollinson@exeter.ac.uk)**

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### **Abstract**

The mundane, concrete practices of social life have often remained under-analysed, unproblematized, even taken for granted by some social theorists, despite their being constitutive of the very foundation of social life. To-date, whilst there exists a growing corpus of ethnographic studies within the sociology of sport, with some notable exceptions, very little analytic attention has been devoted to the concrete practices of actually “doing” sporting activity. Based upon data derived from a collaborative autoethnographic study of distance runners, this article analyses the ways in which two (one female, one male) runners jointly accomplish running-together. The article also examines and “marks” some of the *knowledge in action* that underpins the production of running-together, analysed in relation to three specific areas: 1) ground and performance; 2) safety concerns; and 3) “the other”, in the form of training partner(s), highlighting the importance of both aural and visual components. It concludes with a call for more detailed analytic descriptions of sporting practices in order better to ground more abstract generalisations about sporting phenomena.

**Keywords:** distance running; sociology of sport; embodied knowledge in action

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### **Biographical note:**

**Jacquelyn Allen Collinson** is a Lecturer in the Qualitative Research Unit, University of Exeter. Her research interests include the phenomenology of the sporting body, occupational and leisure identities, identity work. Recent work has appeared in *Sociology*, *The Sociological Review*, and the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.





## **Running the routes together: co-running and knowledge in action**

The mundane, concrete practices of social life have often remained unproblematised, taken for granted by some social theorists, even though they are constitutive of the very foundation of social life. To-date, whilst there exists a growing corpus of ethnographic studies within the sociology of sport, with some notable exceptions (see for example, Kew 1986; Coates 1999), very little attention has been given to the concrete practices of actually accomplishing sporting activity. This form of analysis in general, it is argued, is needed in order to provide social theory with detailed, empirical, analytic descriptions that can be incorporated into more abstract generalizations about social phenomena, in order better to ground these in lived social reality (Craig 2003). The relatively recent “autoethnographic turn” in the analysis of sporting and physical activity experiences, including those of pain and injury, offers great potential for providing analyses complementary to the literature cited above (see for example, Sparkes 1998a, 2000; Denison 1999; Tsang 2000; Allen Collinson and Hockey 2001). This article seeks to add to the sociological literature in analysing a specific sporting activity, middle/long-distance running, or more precisely *running-together*, as an “interactionally co-ordinated and ‘locally accomplished’ form of social action” (Coates 1999, 14), which utilises particular forms of embodied knowledge, one of which might be termed *knowledge in action* (Schön 2005). As Brekhus (1998, 36) has noted in relation to social research in general: “The unmarked generally remains unnamed and unaccented”, and it is therefore considered important to mark as of sociological significance the accomplishment of this particular shared “serious-leisure” activity (Stebbins 2001). Based upon data from a

collaborative autoethnographic research project<sup>1</sup>, this article examines the accomplishment of running-together and the “proficient practical knowledge” (O’Connor 1995) used to do so.

To achieve this purpose, the article is organised as follows. First, the autoethnographic methodology, the research setting and methods are portrayed. Subsequently, the accomplishment of running-together is analysed in relation to three specific areas: 1) ground and performance; 2) safety concerns; 3) the other, in the form of one’s training partner(s); this latter incorporates a discussion of the aural, the visual, and the other’s running line (course of movement). Before considering the autoethnographic approach to data collection used, a brief section follows outlining the symbolic interactionist conception of self and identity utilised in the analysis.

Symbolic interactionist conceptions of identity were of relevance to the research project in general, given their focus on self and identity as processual, developed via interactional work between the social actor and others, in an intersubjective, dynamic, and ongoing social process (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969). Whilst there exists a wide variety of forms of interactionism, ranging from what Douglas (1974, 17) has termed “phenomenological interactionism” to “behavioural interactionism”, the conceptualisation of social actors as pragmatic in that they respond to, and adjust their behaviour in line with their interpretations of the actions of others, is pertinent to this discussion. Symbolic interactionist perspectives on identity vary greatly along a continuum between what might be termed more processual and more structural orientations, where the former place greater emphasis on the processes of identity construction in interaction, so that “subject positions” (Day Sclater 1998, 86) are actively negotiated, including via

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<sup>1</sup> The research team comprised myself and my co-research/co-runner, Dr John Hockey.

narrative and discourse. Of particular relevance to this article is the interpretative work that we undertook as co-runners in order to co-ordinate our running in relation to factors such as pace and line. A salient theme that also emerged from the data analysis centred upon the emotional dimensions of running-together, specifically our emotion management, emotion work and emotional intersubjectivity and this is examined elsewhere (see Allen Collinson 2005).

### **AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

Although in recent decades autoethnography has gained more widespread usage and acceptance within the sociological and anthropological communities (for discussions see: Hayano 1979; Ellis 1997; Reed-Danahay 1997; Sparkes 2000; Allen Collinson and Hockey 2005; Ellis and Bochner 2006), it is not without its critics, and is still deemed a contentious research approach within many social science quarters. As Couser (2005, 126) has noted, the term has been coined separately in different disciplines and remains a “slippery, ambiguous, but useful, indeed indispensable, term”, the ambiguity of which is perhaps a function of its interdisciplinary utility. Indeed, the terminology itself remains open to debate, and a whole panoply of terms and different interpretations of the approach co-exists, for example, self-narratives, *récits de soi/moi*, personal narratives, ethnographic autobiography (Wolcott 2004), to name but a few (see Ellis and Bochner 2000, 739 for a detailed listing). Focussing upon the dialectics of subjectivity and culture, in general sociological autoethnography entails the detailed analysis of one’s own experiences *qua* member of a social group or category. Various ethnographic researchers in sport and dance have taken up this development and utilising their own embodied sporting experiences have produced a range of detailed

autoethnographies or “narratives of the self” (Sparkes 2000) relating to various sporting and physical activities, and also to health problems such as sports injuries (see for example: Kaskisaari 1994; Tiihonen 1994; Rinehart 1995; Sparkes 1996; Tinning 1998; Denison 1999; Kosonen 1999; Silvennoinen 1999a, 1999b; Sudwell 1999; Swan 1999; Allen Collinson and Hockey 2001; Sanders-Bustle and Oliver 2001). Often distinguished from autobiography by its wider socio-cultural focus, autoethnography seeks to analyse events and experiences within the researcher’s life that aim to illuminate wider cultural or subcultural aspects and processes. In this vein, Anderson (2006) proposes the term *analytic autoethnography* to refer to research in which the researcher is 1) a full member in the research group or setting under study; 2) visible as such a member in published accounts; and 3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena, although this latter element is deemed contentious by some (Ellis and Bochner 2006).

Researchers working within a more orthodox framework have sometimes charged autoethnographers with solipsism and self-indulgence (Coffey 1999), and failing to meet traditional research criteria of validity, reliability, and generalisability, particularly in relation to the small “sample” size. In response to such criticisms, exponents of various forms of qualitative enquiry, including autoethnography, have problematized the imposition of such “traditional” criteria as inappropriate, and posited criteria deemed more appropriate for its evaluation, for example: authenticity, fidelity, evocation, congruence, resonance, and aesthetic appeal (Sparkes 2000), to name but a few. The commitment to greater flexibility in doing and writing autoethnography and to more innovative, open-ended ways of evaluating it means that: “there can be no canonical approach to this form of inquiry, no

recipes or rigid formulas” (Sparkes 1998b, 380). Hence, judgments regarding the most appropriate representational forms to use, and evaluation criteria to employ, will always be context dependent, and reaching any agreement and passing judgment, it is argued, are practical and moral tasks rather than simply epistemological ones (Sparkes, 1998b, 381). In addition, the alternative criteria for evaluating forms of interpretive research will of course themselves be open to reinterpretation over time (Smith 1993, 139). As Sparkes (2000, 37) emphasizes, autoethnographers “are willing to describe what one *might* do, but they are not prepared to mandate what one *must* do across all contexts and on all occasions”.

One of the distinctive features of autoethnography is its combination of ethnographic fieldnotes with “headnotes” (Sanjek 1990), that is the researcher’s subjective experience of engaging with the phenomena under study. Autoethnographers constitute a heterogeneous group, varying widely in the specificity of focus on, respectively: the research process and writing (graphy), culture (ethnos), or self (auto) (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Many autoethnographers seek explicitly to “write themselves in” to their research accounts (Tedlock 1991) in an analytic fashion and as an integral part of the research process. For, as Krizek (1998, 93) notes: “...many of us ‘do’ ethnography but ‘write’ in the conservative voice of science”. The autoethnographic enterprise is as noted, however, very broad and encompassing, and best conceptualized as a continuum along which exist numerous ways of collecting, analysing and depicting data, rendering problematic exact definition and precise application (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Consequently there is no one standard form of autoethnographic method or account. Whilst the present article is based upon an autoethnographic study,

elements of the presentational style remain more traditional. This, it should be emphasized, in no way reflects a wish to render the article “devoid of human emotion and self-reflection” (Krizek 1998, 93) but is purely because the primary focus of the article is the analysis of knowledge and action rather than the production of a more deeply reflexive or evocative account. The need for such reflective personal narratives that do not give precedence to the “disembodied author” (Sparkes 1995, 164) is, however, fully acknowledged and welcomed, and other accounts of the research more congruent with the evocative and revelatory elements of the autoethnographic genre have been published elsewhere (see for example, Allen Collinson and Hockey 2001). Whilst this account is not, therefore, intended to be as evocative as other papers written off the data, it aims to meet some of the other criteria appropriate to what has been termed analytic autoethnography.

### ***THE RESEARCH CONTEXT***

In congruence with the general spirit of the autoethnographic enterprise, it is appropriate here to render visible some relevant “accountable knowledge” (Stanley 1992), in order to contextualise my and my co-researcher/runner’s interest and involvement in running and the research project. In brief, I am a female middle/long-distance runner in my late forties, with a running biography that has required a commitment to training 6 or 7 days a week, sometimes twice daily, for 20 years. My (male) running partner, with whom I trained on a regular basis for 19 years, has 40 years of distance-running experience. According to norms prevailing within the British running subculture, both of us fall within the non-élite category, that is those who stand “no realistic chance of winning or being highly placed in any

category within a race” (Smith 2000, 188); but we are nevertheless serious, highly committed *runners*, as opposed to *joggers*. Smith (1998, 176) makes the analytic distinction (familiar to many subcultural insiders) between 1) *athletes* - elite runners who are potential race-winners; 2) *runners*, “who run and train, week in and week out, at levels far in excess of that required for basic physical fitness, yet stand no realistic chance of winning, or doing well in any race”; and 3) *joggers/fun runners*, who train infrequently, only in fair weather, and race even more infrequently, if at all. Under this categorisation, we qualify as *runners*, and under the UK classification system have been veterans for many years. Our involvement in the activity mirrors Stebbins’ (2001) concept of “serious leisure”, in that it requires considerable personal effort, extensive knowledge, commitment and training, and is certainly sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for us, as committed participants, to have developed a “long career in running” (Tulle 2007), acquiring and expressing a combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience (Green and Jones 2005). In addition to our running experience and knowledge, we also share disciplinary knowledge and research interests, both being qualitative sociologists. For us, as for Sanders-Bustle and Oliver (2001, 512): “Running became that shared embodied thread that habitually provided a venue for both personal and scholarly engagements”.

Some years ago, by coincidence we both incurred long-term running injuries almost simultaneously, and quickly arrived at a collective decision systematically to document our responses to the injuries and subsequent rehabilitation. A principal motive for this decision was to elicit something positive out of a highly negative athletic experience. It was consequently one of those unhappy accidents of current biography that provided access, physical and psychological, to the research setting (Lofland and Lofland

1985, 11) and kindled our interest in autoethnography as a methodological approach. The injury and subsequent rehabilitative process took just over two years, during which time data collection was undertaken via the methods detailed below. During attempts at rehabilitation, and through the systematic analysis of our data, certain issues began to emerge, stimulated largely by the fact that we were obliged to re-learn *how* to run, and this threw into sharp relief the complexities of accomplishing running. We questioned how we actually perceived and traversed our running routes, taking into account performance and safety concerns, and also how we managed the complex achievement of running-together. Somewhat ironically, it was only when we were *walking* around our normal running routes as part of our rehabilitative programme that we had the opportunity to co-analyse just how we *ran* the routes. Formerly, during actual running, this knowledge had remained largely tacit and certainly unquestioned, as will be discussed.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

With regard to data collection, the recording of our experiences was done via field notes and micro-tape recorders that accompanied us during daily training and rehabilitation, and also on occasion to health-practitioner visits. Each of us as co-runners and co-researchers constructed our own individual daily logs, whilst a third collective log synthesised the emergent, salient, shared, analytic themes, together with any differences in our individual adaptation to and management of the injured state. In the data that follow, quotations are included verbatim, extracted from both our individual logs (Logs 1 and 2 respectively), with the kind permission of my co-researcher. We analysed and re-analysed the journal entries, employing processes of re-memory (Pearce 1997; Sanders-Bustle and Oliver 2001) to

send ourselves back in our time-tunnel and recapture past experience, formulating narratives in order to give meaning to our experiences (Smith and Sparkes 2005; Allen Collinson and Hockey 2001). The importance of narrative activity has been emphasized by many, including those who contend that narrative and self are in fact inseparable in that narrative is born out of experience and simultaneously gives shape to that experience (Ochs and Capps 1996). The narrative method of analysis focuses on how people organise and assign meanings to their experiences via narrative construction. Narratives also combine the social with the personal (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), for, as many have noted, personal stories are intimately linked to the cultural and subcultural resources upon which social actors draw.

Our relatively extended experience as veteran runners gave us some confidence of being sufficiently technically competent at the activity as to be able to identify, describe and understand the phenomenon as insider members involved in the local production of running-together. This corresponds with Weeks' (1996) analysis of achieving musical co-ordination, where insider knowledge is crucial in order to "recover just what members are doing" (1996, 199). After some deliberation, we decided against the video-taping of our rehabilitative activities due to the impracticality and constraint of carrying a video-recorder during training. We preferred instead to rely upon the daily, detailed recording of our experiences via tape-recorders and extensive field notes; tapes were transcribed as soon as practicable after recording.

During the data analysis process, we became progressively aware that a key factor in our running routines was the knowledge upon which we so frequently drew in order to develop our training. When, as part of our

rehabilitation, we *walked* around our training routes, we also *talked* the routes in-depth, sharing our route knowledge regarding the nature of the terrain, the various obstacles, best paths, and so on. Rarely had such information been explicitly exchanged during actual running, but in the more relaxed, less physically demanding conditions of walking, it became possible to subject it to analytic scrutiny. As Schön (2005, 49) has noted:

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way... Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action. (emphasis in original)

Documenting and then analysing this “knowing” subsequently became part of the data collection process as we engaged in both reflecting-on-action and reflecting-in-action (Schön 2005). In common with many taken for granted activities, the intricacies involved in the production of running-together and the knowledge we utilised were made analytically visible when the activity itself was rendered problematic, in this case through injury.

### **RUNNERS’ KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION**

The paper now charts some of the knowledge we used for the practical accomplishment of running-together. Whilst the knowledge is portrayed here in explicit fashion so as to give the reader some feel for the runner’s world, in reality during actual training, this information is rarely at the forefront of our consciousness, but is largely tacit knowledge, informing our training, enhancing efficiency and safety. Given our familiarity with certain favoured routes, we have embodied knowledge of the degree of effort

required at certain points, together with the particular technique demanded for optimum performance. When ascending a slope or pitch, for example, the quadriceps muscles must work harder, stride-length shortens, the body is angled into the slope, breathing rate increases... Simultaneously we are identifying and checking the best line. This knowledge is truly knowing-in-action, the know-how being in the action (Schön 2005), producing a synthesis of route- and corporeal- knowledge, in a specific context. How we physically accomplish running is informed by our knowledge, in terms of actions such as where we place and position our feet in specific circumstances: close together on rough, uneven ground, far apart when striding downhill, and so on. In turn, the phenomenological experience of running over this specific terrain feeds back into our stock of knowledge (Schutz 1967), constantly subject to updating and revision as circumstances change and experience grows.

Analogously, with regard to the actual accomplishment of running-together, Ryave and Schenkein (1975, 269) provide an ethnomethodological analysis of the production of walking-together, where actors are involved in a dual task of: a) production work - in this case our production of running-together; and b) recognition work on the part of observers (including ourselves as participants, observing and recognizing ourselves as doing running-together). Although there is not the space here to consider wider aspects of this co-production (such as *how* spatial proximity is maintained), our runners' knowledge in action will now be examined in relation to three specific areas: ground, safety and "the other".

### **GROUND AND PERFORMANCE**

For social actors in general, landscape, space and terrain are evaluated using broad cultural codes (Rose 1993, 89). Particular communities and

groups, however, are found to view and assess landscape in distinct ways; for example, it is argued that women view public space in a certain way (Brooks Gardner 1980), as do soldiers with regard to countryside (Woodward 1998). When training, distance runners evaluate terrain on the basis of their subcultural knowledge (Hockey and Allen Collinson 2006), visually interrogating the terrain in a highly focused way in order to facilitate movement, maintain momentum, enhance performance, and importantly, to avoid injury. Where training routes are new and unknown, knowledge must be accumulated and tested gradually. Experienced runners construct routes to facilitate their particular training objectives (Hockey 2004), seeking to avoid hazardous contexts (poor street-lighting, heavy traffic, densely populated pavements, dark pathways, uneven pavements and fields) and identifying types of terrain conducive to unencumbered running (quiet roads and footpaths, smooth pavements and parkland, traffic-free zones). Once routes are established, the minutiae of the terrain become known over repeated training runs. Such knowledge of routes or sections of routes often circulates informally between distance runners and may even become common knowledge; shared by members of athletic clubs generally via “club runs” (Hockey 2004) and passed on to newcomers. Routes which cover a variety of different kinds of terrain, for example, are valued for their conduciveness to doing “Fartlek” (speed-play) sessions, which involve running at a variable pace over varied terrain, alternating hard efforts with a reduction in pace. By contrast, for “steady state” running, a long, flat stretch of road or grass might be selected.

In theoretical terms, it is possible to categorize runners’ routes as a particular kind of “social space” (Lefebvre 1991). It is via the embodied practice of distance training that this particular kind of space is produced or

created. For the purpose of this article, the three intersections of social space that van Ingen (2003, 202-204) identifies in Lefebvre's work appear to be particularly apposite. It should be noted that in Lefebvre's construction these three forms are not discrete, but rather social space is comprised of all three. The first kind of engagement outlined is that of *spatial practice* or *perceived space* which in our case involves physical running through/over the particular social space(s) known to us as training routes. The second kind of engagement involves what Lefebvre calls *representations of space*, or *conceived space*; social spaces that are abstract and imagined. As runners, we engage with representations of space through our thoughts, ideas, plans, narratives and memories, such as sharing fond memories of a particular route. The third form of engagement, perhaps the most nebulous in his formulation, is what Lefebvre terms *spaces of representation* or *lived space*: "the social space through which life is directly lived" (van Ingen 2003, 204). Lived space combines all spaces simultaneously, the concrete and the metaphysical, and can be "experienced passively or it can be linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life" (Lefebvre 1991, quoted in van Ingen, 2003, 204). Of direct relevance to this article is the idea that this lived space produces specific forms of *knowing*, which are the outcome of spatial practices and which in turn inform those spatial practices.

One such specific form of knowing relates to the "going" of the terrain: the condition underfoot as it affects conduciveness to performance, and which constitutes part of the runner's "local knowledge" concerning a route. In addition to such grounded, spatial knowledge, the runner must also attend to temporal variables, as the particularities of route are liable to change radically, seasonally and indeed diurnally (Hockey and Allen

Collinson 2006). Fields, for instance, that normally provide good going, may deteriorate into rough, slippery and heavy going as a result of seasonal or meteorological change, impeding performance, as indicated by a fieldnote:

It's dark midwinter and been raining for most of the week. J suggests: "We'd best run through the estate and avoid that boggy patch under the trees? Shame to have to go on the road, but it'll be a quagmire after all that rain and in the dark we'll be staggering our way through mud". "Yeah," I reply, "and we don't want to put the old Achilles (tendon) under any more pressure." (Log 2)

Likewise, country roads usually categorised positively in relation to going (and safety) in the daytime may be transformed once darkness descends. Not only arises the danger of being knocked by a vehicle, but the rapid change in lighting conditions from dazzling car headlights to engulfing darkness may cause temporary blinding, resulting in enforced pace reduction. Knowledge regarding the route and its going is therefore structured spatially and seasonally, as illustrated:

Hit the eroded approach path to the park, it's ok this weather, but in the very wet months it has a propensity to get slushy and is difficult footing, causing one to slide suddenly, much to the pained consternation of inner thigh adductors. So I normally avoid that area in the winter and take the road, unless wearing cross-country studs (cleats). (Log 1)

### **SAFETY ON THE GROUND**

For most runners, female and male, safety constitutes a major factor in the selection of running routes. This section considers two forms of knowledge relating to: safety from harassment, and first, the rather more

mundane concerns of accidental injury caused by fellow pedestrians and their animals. At this juncture, interactionist perspectives are particularly apposite, with Goffman's (1963) and Smith's (1997) work on behaviour in public being of particular relevance. It should be noted that as the article focuses upon achieving running-together (by a female and a male runner), its purpose is not to examine the significant issue of the gendered nature of running and indeed the gendering of public places, although the reader is referred to some interesting material on the differential treatment of women in public spaces generally and of women runners specifically.<sup>2</sup>

From the runner's perspective, collision and near-collision with other pedestrians constitute a routine hazard for those who undertake their training in what Smith (1997, 60) terms "normatively-ordered spaces", and caution is required in anticipating such hazards. The following field note relates to a section of the route that required a frustrating reduction in pace in order to navigate human and canine obstacles:

Cautiously, I slow down, knowing that with the narrowing of the path as it reaches the gates I am liable to encounter some combination of: parents with prams, mountain bikers with attitude, psychotic pets and deranged children, all with the capacity to shoot into my path and do me damage! (Log 1)

Such public spaces are regulated not only by law and traffic codes, but also by a range of mostly taken-for-granted, indeterminate rules of interactional conduct, analogous to the informal, tacit "code of the street" (Jimerson and Oware 2006). In the majority of cases recorded during data collection, the expectation of our fellow pedestrian(s) appeared to be that

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<sup>2</sup> For interesting discussions of the gendered nature of interaction in public places and civil inattention, see for example Brooks Gardner (1980), and Smith (1997).

we runners should take primary responsibility for any avoidance action. As the research did not involve questioning co-pedestrians, it is not possible to ascertain whether this expectation was based purely upon the notion that we were engaged in the minority activity of running (in contrast to walking) and therefore should feel obliged to make way for the walker due to the somewhat “deviant” nature of our activity. Or perhaps the expectation was based upon velocity, in that the walker was moving more slowly (usually) than the runner, who was consequently expected to make allowance for the slower-moving person-object. A further possibility is the perceived purpose or function of the shared space, in that footpaths/pavements are usually normatively designated for *walking*, although interestingly not legally coded (in England) as such, merely as according a right of way *on foot*.

We did record that in a small minority of cases the reverse situation applied: walkers would politely cede passage to us, an event usually accompanied by an appropriate breach of “civil inattention” (Goffman 1963), in the form of an encouraging look, and sometimes a positive remark such as: “after you” or “well done!”. As Brooks Gardner (1980, 331) has noted in relation to such breaches, citizens have a right to catch their fellow citizens out of role in terms of the role of “properly comported citizen”. In some ways, it appears that a runner in public places deviates from proper comportment and thus becomes an “open person” (Goffman 1963), at least in the eyes of the general walking public and outside of specific events such as races. In the majority of cases, our data revealed it to be adults of middle age or older who tended to make way for us, whether walking solo or in a group. The strength of the general normative expectation that runners, at least in Britain, should give way to walkers could be ascertained by the fact that any violation of this tacit norm resulted in certain visible and/or audible

social consequences, ranging from mildly disapproving looks, mutterings, tuttings, through to highly “uncivil attention” (Smith 1997, 64) such as verbal abuse, jostling, and even on one occasion assault on my partner by a teenage girl with a heavy handbag.

These norms of ceding passage applied primarily to adult co-pedestrians; young children, teenagers and dogs were found to constitute distinct behavioural categories. The data revealed, unsurprisingly perhaps, that young children and dogs were found to be largely exempt from any responsibility for taking avoidance action, at least on their own initiative. Only if adults physically moved them or instructed them to stand aside were young children and to some extent, dogs, expected to give way to oncoming runners. As has been highlighted (Smith 1997, 63), dogs constitute a persistent nuisance for runners in general, and we have regularly been assailed by breeds of all types and sizes, even when notionally under the control of owners. In acknowledging that the dog itself has little responsibility for its actions, our most intense frustration and bitter contempt are reserved for a particular breed of dog-owner. These are the irresponsible individuals who, despite polite requests that they restrain their animals, make at best derisory attempts at control, usually via feebly-uttered, even apologetic (to the dog) “commands”, such as in one field note: (in hesitant tone to yapping dog in assault mode) “Boo, come here darling, don’t be naughty”. In this instance, small though it was, Boo nevertheless managed to trip both of us up several times and refused steadfastly to obey its owner’s half-hearted exhortations to sit still.

As Smith (1997) notes, there is a fundamental conflict of interest between runners and dog owners; one regularly fought out in parks the world over. Gradually over time we have built up knowledge of how best to

deal with dogs and their problematic owners. Tactics include regular “dog patrols”, where we swiftly scan canine-populated zones for evidence of any loose, aggressive dog and shout out warnings to fellow runners, should one come within range. Requests to owners to hold in their pets are usually made in polite but firm tones, and although we may reason briefly with the owner as to the need for responsible behaviour, over the years we have learnt to avoid becoming embroiled in any extended debate as this only interferes with the training run and thereby increases levels of frustration at the canine encounter:

A yapping, small terrier-type dog comes bounding across the park towards us. “Watch out, there’s a stupid billy (one of our canine categories) left of arc,” mutters J. The crazed, yapping creature circles us tightly, nipping at our ankles and shins. “Can you hold your dog in, please,” requests J, wearily rather than angrily. “Oh, he’s just playing. Don’t be so bad-tempered,” retorts his owner, somewhat provocatively. We both start to engage in discussions with the woman, centred around the fact that he *might* be playing, but he’s in danger of a) tripping us up and causing injury; b) being kicked accidentally (but possibly deliberately by this stage of frustration) and being injured himself. After a few minutes of increasingly ill-tempered debate, we both look at each other with resignation, recognising the futility, and decide there’s no point in furthering the discussion as we are wasting valuable running time. (Log 2)

In considering more deliberately produced hazards, in relation to verbal and on occasion physical harassment, Smith (1997, 63) has vividly

portrayed the strategies runners use to deal with various forms of harassment - and even assault, whilst training in public places. This section focuses upon verbal harassment principally, but in general runners become highly sensitized to those contexts that harbour risks of verbal and particularly physical attack, deploying a range of avoidance strategies and tactics. Perhaps the most basic strategy is the avoidance of places and contexts where harassment is deemed likely to occur. As Brooks Gardner (1980, 345) notes in relation to women in general, many stay away from sites where they fear verbal harassment may occur, and even avoid (sometimes for years) places where an offensive remark has been made. Whilst there is certainly some sense of safety in numbers (if only in a dyad) my running partner and I have accrued knowledge about certain contexts to be avoided whenever possible, for example areas where there are likely to be crowds of intoxicated pub- or bar-goers. Not only are such groups likely to provide a source of verbal harassment (of the good-natured and amusing variety though this can on occasion be), but their lack of physical control due to inebriation also harbours the potential for unwanted physical encounters, as some meandering sot purposefully or accidentally stumbles across our route.

In relation to more transient contexts, whenever I am out running as a solo woman, I tend to take avoidance action if I sight a group of men or teenage boys in range, as past experience indicates a high probability of having to deal with street remarks (Brooks Gardner 1980) from this kind of gathering. On analysing the data, it clearly emerged that teenagers formed a very distinct behavioural unit, especially when in “an idling congregation” (Smith 1997, 61), or the notorious “lolling group” portrayed by Goffman (1963, 58). Teenage girls and boys generally proved the most challenging

navigational problem of all since they were prone to make deliberate efforts to *create* a hazard, by blocking the route or even, in the case of my running partner, hurling a house brick or swinging a heavy bag at him. Men of a supposedly adult status also exhibited similar tendencies to breach norms of civil inattention when in a dyad or group, via the shouting of street remarks. Even on occasion lone men felt “licensed” to make comments (Brooks Gardner 1980) to me as a woman runner:

Early afternoon, we were running down the high street. Not our usual route, but we needed to pick up something in town towards the end of the run. J diverted off to nip into the gents’ toilet, so I jogged around whilst waiting for him. Suddenly felt someone brush against me and comment, quite loudly: “Fantastic arse, Love!”. Before I have chance to utter a withering rejoinder, he is vanishing off down the pavement, turning around to smile and nod, presumably in what he considers an appreciative fashion. (Log 2)

If accompanied by the “protective shield” of a male runner or runners, however, the chances of receiving such unwelcome attention were greatly reduced, to my feminist consternation and analytic interest. As Hanmer and Saunders (1984, 39) have noted in relation to women in public spaces generally: “women’s sense of security in public spaces is profoundly shaped by our inability to secure an undisputed right to occupy that space”. My right to occupy public space – both as a woman and as a runner – is clearly in dispute, as testified by the regular verbal challenges towards this particular role combination.

The above section has considered knowledge relating to safety - from accidental injury, and from verbal harassment. The next section focusses upon a final element of our stock of knowledge, one which emerged from

data analysis as salient in the production of running-together: knowledge of “the other” in the form of one’s running partner(s).

### **KNOWLEDGE OF THE OTHER**

This kind of knowledge, often central to successful training, can easily be overlooked. As indicated above, running-together is a complex form of social action, “interactionally co-ordinated and ‘locally accomplished’” (Coates 1999, 14). As has been noted in relation to other pedestrian activity, the production of *walking-together* involves the participants in at least maintaining spatial proximity in some recognizable pattern (Ryave and Schenkein 1975, 271), and requires some degree of physical co-presence. Co-presence can certainly be seen as a necessary, but not sufficient criterion for running-together. Its insufficiency is evidenced by the observation that people in each other’s co-presence are not necessarily perceived or perceive themselves to be socially “together”, or, as Ryave and Schenkein (1975, 270) neatly term it: “identifiable as a proper togetherness”. So, people may be sitting in very close proximity for example on public transport, even in physical contact, but their togetherness is accidental and incidental in that they find themselves in such proximity by chance not design. Also, importantly, they attribute no real social significance to their co-presence. Analogously, one might find oneself running along in close proximity to another, but not by design and usually for only a short period. This occurs particularly on routes highly populated by runners, and may lead sometimes to feelings of unease as one decides at what pace to continue, and whether to end the chance encounter as soon as possible or to run alongside the unexpected companion, at least for a while, in order to avoid giving offence by appearing unsociable.

In addition to observational indicators such as spatial proximity, running-together by design may be recognisable via other visual cues such as conversing, physical contact, uniformity of direction and pace. In particular, running-together requires of participants considerable effort and attention to the maintenance of approximately the same *pace* in order not to lose too great a degree of proximity, and produce running-alone. Accomplishing running at more or less the same pace for the majority of the time presents quite a challenge, however, given that co-runners are highly unlikely to run at the same pace “naturally”, that is left to set their own pace independently of the other. Given differences over a range of parameters, such as our preferred natural pace, different degrees of sure-footedness over rough ground and other terrain hazards, different abilities with regard to hill-climbing and descent, not to mention different levels of “form” on any given day, achieving running-together often demands concentrated activity. In the case of my training partner and myself, having trained together on a regular basis for nearly 20 years, we have become practised at and highly attuned to judging and achieving a mutually acceptable pace. This we do via our knowledge of the other in relation to a whole series of indicators of running-being. Some of this insider knowledge will now be examined in relation to two chosen elements: visual and aural cues.

### ***INSIDER KNOWLEDGE: THE AURAL***

Detailed data analysis revealed that various aural indicators were used to judge the requisite pace needed to achieve running-together at any given point on the route. A primary aural cue used to assess one another’s current state of “going” (a term used in relation to a runner’s performance as well as to terrain), is that of breathing rate and style - the rapidity, depth

and general noise characteristics of breathing. As I suffer from exercise-induced asthma, my co-runner has over the years become particularly attuned to the importance of breathing cues as indicators of my running with relative ease and fluidity, or conversely, struggling to maintain the pace, for example:

We are out on a 7-miler this evening, lots of hills and I have been noticing J is struggling with them - usually she has to work hard but her breathing doesn't usually take on the awful wheezing sound coming tonight, there is no rhythm to it, it's just ragged. Eventually she goes through the bad patch and begins to breathe more easily.

JA: "God, I thought I was going to pass out earlier, my ears were ringing and I felt so dizzy. Must have been all the pollution in Newport (an industrial town in South Wales) at the weekend."

JC: "Yeah, I know, I could hear your breathing was really wheezy, especially going up past the tennis courts. Slowed right down when I heard ya. It seems to have settled a bit now though, Bud?" (Log 1)

Reciprocally, I attend to his breathing patterns. If receiving signals that the other's breathing is more laboured than usual, we tend to reduce our individual pace, taking into account of course other contextual factors which might produce a degree of breathlessness, such as steep or uneven terrain. Conversely, steady, even breathing denotes a partner's good going, as does holding a prolonged conversation without any indication of breathlessness. Such acute listening has been noted by other co-runners: "We listened – often enslaved to bodily voices and out of respect for one another, and found ourselves slowing down or on rare occasion stopping altogether" (Sanders-Bustle and Oliver 2002, 513).

Conversational forms are likewise used to assist in establishing and maintaining running synchronization. These may be in the form of direct questions or utterances, to elicit information about the other's general state of running-being or to describe one's own self-feelings, or speculate about terrain. Utterances may take on a ritualistic aspect in that the expression is used repeatedly in certain contexts. We are known, for example, to articulate the following on a regular basis after a long day at work: "Well, the old body doesn't want to go today/tonight/this evening", normally at the start of a training run, thus indicating that the run is unlikely to be a smooth, relatively effortless, pleasure cruise, with the tacit understanding that the other partner should bear in mind that the speaker is definitely not on top form. Muttered cursing and swearing by my partner constitute a colourful verbal indicator of difficult going, and I have become relatively practised at judging his form by the rate at which swear words erupt into the conversation. Knowledge of the other's use of a whole range of non-verbal cues such as grunting, groaning, sighing, provides an indicator as precise as any worded statement in assessing the other's running form.

### ***INSIDER KNOWLEDGE: THE VISUAL***

In relation to the visual, Sudnow (1972) has highlighted the importance of "the glance", especially in contexts where *only* glances are possible or permissible. Throughout the training run, we regularly use the glance to check and monitor various indicators of the other's form. More extended visual checking is not generally advisable due to the need to concentrate intently upon the immediate terrain. Swift glances, however, are efficient means of gauging facial expression as reflective of the other's state of being, based on extensive knowledge of her/his modes of expression.

Generally speaking, frowning, grimaces, tense jaw line, sunken eyes, all testify to a lack of running ease. This does, however, vary considerably between runners, some of whom habitually display frowning, grimacing, furrowed brow, as indicators of concentration rather than any state of distress. Knowledge of one's training partner's stock of expressions is therefore important in order to avoid misinterpretation. Expressions of "dys-ease" may provide the observer with advance notice to slow her or his pace either imminently or, depending upon the particular facial expression, at a subsequent point in the training run.

Such knowledge relates not only to the facial; corporeal expressions are checked and monitored in an analogous fashion. Factors such as the angle of the upper body, tenseness of neck, shoulders and arms, stride length, *inter alia*, are all rapidly analysed in order to judge a partner's going. Stumbling, tripping over, rolling the head, moving the upper body laterally more than usual, dragging the feet, knocking knees, and generally looking "ragged", would also signal that the other is struggling to some degree and may require a reduction in pace in order to achieve a mutually appropriate tempo:

We are out on a 6-miler, it's hot and humid and I'm momentarily running behind J, conscious that he's looking a bit ragged:

JA: "How ya doing, Bud?"

JC: "Absolutely knackered, that bloody meeting has left me absolutely knackered."

JA: "I thought you were struggling, your shoulder was up again. Didn't think it was the time to point out fine issues of form, though! It's all you can do to get round in any fashion sometimes. Come on, Bud – only a couple more miles to go." (Log 2)

Arriving at an assessment of the other's running being thus requires a good deal of prior knowledge of, and familiarity with the other's routine facial and corporeal expressions.

### ***KNOWLEDGE OF THE OTHER'S LINE***

Another salient element of knowledge utilised in the achievement of running-together relates to the precise joint navigation of the route, in terms of selection of a line from the myriad of possible "paths", without crossing each other's trajectory. Avoiding collisions with, or "cutting up" (precipitously moving in front of) one's partner requires a good deal of concentration, attention, checking and regulation of position, both of self and other, adjustment and readjustment. The "navigational problem" of walking has been described vividly by Ryave and Schenkein (1975), who observe that co-walkers' avoidance of collisions with one another or with other physical obstacles is the outcome of concerted work. Such self-management requires even more concentrated effort when one is running at greater speed, over uneven ground and/or in space-constrained contexts. Weeks (1996) has noted that in relation to achieving synchrony in musical performance, each performer must take into account the other's actions, and this "practical reflexivity" requires mutual interpretation and anticipation. An analogous reflexivity is required to produce running-together, and we use our stock of knowledge of route, body, and the other in order to accomplish this. In order to illustrate knowledge of line, I consider briefly and specifically the navigation and negotiation of convergence and divergence points; the latter being points on the run where our paths, geographical and temporal, diverge.

Where the route has a high degree of familiarity to both of us, running-together is accomplished with greater ease because we hold knowledge not

only of our own preferred line, but also of the other person's chosen line across certain areas. As Sanders-Bustle and Oliver (2001) note, co-runners often settle into a bodily understanding of which side to run on. When crossing a certain section of open parkland on a slight incline, for example, I typically take the upper ground whilst my partner opts for the flatter stretch. Approaching this area, both of us diverge slightly in preparation for establishing our separate lines. Over many runs we have built up knowledge and come to recognise and anticipate the divergence point. Having covered the slope via separate lines, we subsequently converge again for the next part of the route. As indicated earlier, for the most part, this knowledge is tacit and rarely brought to the forefront of consciousness unless something disrupts the flow, as highlighted in the following fieldnote:

We've been engaged in deep discussions about the research tonight, a cold but beautiful, frosty night. As we were crossing the top of the park up by the street lamps of the housing estate, we were in such animated conversation that we forgot to take our usual separate lines, and J found himself *up* the slope from me. Suddenly recognising this fact, we were somewhat disorientated and nearly stumbled into each other. "Ha, ha: a breaching practice!" I remarked mischievously, and we both burst out laughing, further disrupting our staggered running. (Log 2)

Over our running routes, these convergence and divergence points are many and varied, mainly comprising "natural boundaries" (Ryave and Schenkein 1975, 266) such as road junctions, roundabouts, traffic islands, underpasses, the apex of slopes. All these land features act as convergence

points where, if necessary, and based upon our route knowledge one of us will slow down or even stop to wait for the other.

These then are the principal elements of knowledge we utilise in achieving running-together, and for us this particular stock of knowledge was largely tacit until running (and consequently running-together) was rendered problematic by the occurrence of long-term injuries. Knowledge relating to ground and safety has been examined and found to be of great importance in selecting the best routes in terms of both performance and security; knowledge of the other is essential for the production of effective and efficient running-together. This embodied “proficient practical knowledge” (O’Connor 2005) allows the anticipation of the myriad possible hazards and challenges, which runners routinely encounter in their mundane practice of training in public spaces, and so helps to achieve the runner’s goal of enhanced performance.

### **SUMMARY**

This article, utilising data from a collective autoethnographic research study, seeks to address a gap in the sociological literature via an analysis of a specific sporting activity, and also of the knowledge-in-action that runners use in order to accomplish running-together. This constitutes a form of local, specialised knowledge acquired as a result of “socially specific spatial practices” (Stewart 1995, 611), undertaken in our case over a decade of regular running of a specific array of routes. The route itself is constructed not only during the physical running of it, but also as a *conceived space* (Lefebvre 1991) pictured in our minds’ eyes, both in anticipation and in retrospect. The route is also interactionally constructed via discourse between ourselves and with other runners. Such specialised knowledge is accumulated and operationalised in order to facilitate and enhance the

running. The effort, focussed concentration and corporeal management needed to produce mundane activities such as running-together should not be underestimated. Indeed, the high degree of concentration and practical work required to accomplish running-together is vividly illustrated when we contrast the demands of running-together with running-alone; the latter being a relatively easy solo production in comparison. The paper has sought to portray some of the interactional work involved in accomplishing this joint production, where each must take the role of the other and engage in swift self-reflexivity over our actions. Such practical reflexivity requires mutual interpretation and anticipation, and over the years of co-running we have developed a high degree of inter-subjectivity.

The mundane, concrete, routine practices of social actors are all too often left “unmarked “ and “unaccented” (Brekhus 1998, 36), taken for granted and unproblematized in their use as the basis for theory generation. Approaches such as ethnomethodological ethnography and analytic autoethnography, for example, have the capacity to provide social theory with empirical analytic descriptions that can be incorporated into more abstract generalisations about social (including sporting) phenomena, in order better to ground these in social reality (Craig 2003). As Lynch (2001) has noted, what is really at stake is not so much the theoretical problem of order, but the substantive production of order on singular occasions. It is hoped that this paper has started to unveil and subject to analysis some of the complexities of one such substantive corporeal and interactional production: running-together, and the “knowledge in action” utilized in order to accomplish it.



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