

Gender, Embodiment, and Self-Regulation: Surveillance in Canadian Intercollegiate Women's Distance Running

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Abstract: This article draws on data collected through semi-structured interviews with intercollegiate cross country and track athletes to investigate how female distance runners experience their sport concerning 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. Drawing on Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, this paper explores how dominant discourses on gender and the body are reproduced within distance running through a combination of structural and cultural practices. However, the paper also highlights resistance to cultural ideals among female runners, calling for a more dynamic understanding of disciplinary power that accounts for individual agency.

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The central thrust of Foucault's (1977) work is that individuals are subjected to covert disciplinary practices that are internalized, prompting them to become self-regulating. In this manner, individuals develop forms of embodiment that are consistent with the discourses they are exposed to. Sport

has been shown to be an institution that replicates dominant discourses on gender and the body, facilitating the production of what Foucault (1977) calls "docile bodies." Docile bodies are produced through regimentation, making organized sport a strategic site for analyzing disciplinary power. Women's distance running is especially suitable for this kind of analysis due to its highly regimented nature and emphasis on fit bodies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female distance runners through semi-structured interviews, attending to the following research questions: First, to what extent does women's distance running reinforce dominant conventions on gender and the body? Second, if disciplinary power operates in women's distance running, what are the mechanisms through which it does so? And finally, how do female distance runners respond to the disciplining forces and discourses to which they are subject?

The paper begins with a brief discussion of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and his concept of "docile bodies." Following an explanation of the methodology employed, the study's findings are presented in three sections that describe the discourses that permeate women's distance running, the participants' descriptions of the mechanisms by which these discourses are enforced, and their responses to disciplinary power in their sport. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the study's findings for our understanding of precisely how disciplinary power works.

Docile Bodies

A central figure in studies of modern and pre-modern forms of power, Foucault wrote extensively on matters pertaining to corporality, surveillance, governmentality, and power relations more broadly

(Rabinow and Rose 2003; Foucault et al. 2009). His works have been applied to the study of various cultural phenomena, including art, music, literature, and sport, elucidating some of the ways that power dynamics operate within diverse cultural settings. Because of his emphasis on power relations, Foucault's work is particularly salient for understanding cultural platforms as vectors of control (Beckman 2018).

Although Foucault was not a sports sociologist, his work on power relations provides an understanding of how surveillance practices become habitual within sporting environments in ways that replicate dominant cultural discourses. His analysis of corporeal disciplinary practices is especially useful for understanding women's competitive distance running as a site of self-regulation and social control. In his 1977 work *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault's discussion of power foregrounds the body as an object and target of power. According to Foucault, disciplinary power is a form of social control rooted in surveillance and regimentation. It operates through covert disciplinary practices that become normalized and prompt individuals to become self-regulating.

Foucault (1977) argues that in modern societies, surveillance plays a key role in sustaining power relations through subtle disciplinary techniques. Surveillance is covertly embedded in all facets of society, prompting self-regulation and adherence to social convention. Since surveillance mechanisms are subtle, their presence lacks external visibility. That covert nature of surveillance lends itself to normalization; individuals adopt the disciplinary techniques they are exposed to (Foucault 1977). Disciplinary techniques promote self-regulation and impose restraints on docile subjects in ways that uphold existing power regimes.

As subjects internalize surveillance technologies and become self-regulating, they become “docile bodies” (Foucault 1977:138). Foucault (1977:138) asserts that docile bodies constitute “subjected and practiced bodies.” These bodies respond to disciplinary techniques through compliance, and do so efficiently (Foucault 1977). Key features of docility include discipline, economic 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 (Foucault 1977).

Sport and exercise constitute one form of disciplinary practice through which docile bodies are shaped (Markula and Pringle 2006). Different exercise techniques produce different types of bodies 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. For instance, coaching practices can help sustain such bodies within specific sporting environments. Disciplinary technologies, such as drills, skill sessions, fitness programs, or punitive measures can all serve to create docile bodies capable of fitting into a particular athletic setting. In fact, the highly regimented nature of athletic training renders sport a particularly efficient way to promote docility. As such, the sport has been aptly characterized as “an important social regulator” (Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010:231).

Although the term “docile bodies” implies passivity, it is important to note that Foucault’s analysis does not view power as unilateral. Instead, Foucault’s conception of power is relational and exerted through all acting agents in a relationship (Foucault 1988a). Thus, rather than being seen as a determin-

ing force, disciplinary power exerts influence in ways that can be modified and resisted. While some agents are better positioned than others to influence its balance, power can be harnessed by all (Foucault 1977; 1988a). Moreover, power cannot be held; it can only be translated, as it remains in constant motion in a web of exchange (Foucault 1988a). By conceiving of power as fluid, relational, and multifaceted, Foucault’s analysis leaves room for resistance. Indeed, Foucault (1978:95) views power and resistance as intertwined and explicitly states that “where there is power, there is resistance.” According to Foucault, power relations are always characterized by points of resistance distributed throughout the power network.

Although Foucault is attentive to the agency throughout his extensive body of work, much of his writing on resistance has been overlooked in discussions of disciplinary power and the subject’s capacity for resistance (Oksala 2005). Nonetheless, some Foucauldian analyses have made notable efforts to highlight the attention to agency and resistance (e.g., Butler 1997; McWhorter 1999; Oksala 2004; Amigot and Pujal 2009; Medina 2011). For example, McWhorter (1999) critically examines Foucault’s key works through the lens of her experiences as a sexual minority, explicitly stating that Foucault’s work does not preclude agency. Medina (2011) draws on Foucault’s genealogy to highlight memory practices as a critical approach to resistance against oppression and dominant ideologies. Similarly, Amigot and Pujal (2009:655) identify “practices of the self” as a precursor to resistance and freedom. As these works illustrate, Foucault’s writings clearly address avenues for resistance.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) identifies the body as a channel of resistance. Bodies and plea-

asures, he argues, yield the potential to subvert normalizing practices. In his later work, Foucault develops his analysis to discuss conscious awareness as a key element of resistance, highlighting the self as the locus of transformative potential (Foucault 1988b). In that work, Foucault articulates how conscious awareness of normalizing practices can effect self-transformation, enabling individuals to transcend disciplinary power (1988b). According to Foucault, individuals adopt "technologies of the self," which are mechanisms by which individuals can invoke self-transformation towards "a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988b:18). Technologies of the self are characterized by self-care and self-knowledge through which individuals can recognize themselves as subjects and develop resistance against disciplinary power (Foucault 1988b).

Following that line of thought, several scholars have examined how runners disrupt normative assumptions about idealized athletic bodies. For instance, Chase's (2008) study of Clydesdale runners examines how normative assumptions about the ideal running body are challenged by a heavier class of runners. Chase (2008:145) finds that the existence of Clydesdale running bodies and communities "challenges the normative ideals of appropriate running bodies and the disciplinary processes associated with distance running." While Chase's study provides an excellent example of resistance in distance running, resistance is located primarily in the body. Foucault, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for developing a requisite level of critical awareness before being able to use technologies of the self as freedom practices (Markula 2003). In a similar vein, Bridel and Rail's (2007) study of gay male marathoners examines how these athletes discursively construct their bodies in ways that contravene domi-

nant representations of the male body, identifying conscious resistance as a requisite for change. Although a Foucauldian framework is not employed, Tulle's (2007) work also acknowledges the transformative potential of distance running by revealing how the agency and embodiment of elite veteran distance runners can challenge dominant discourses on aging.

As with other sports, distance running can reinforce dominant discourses on gender and the body. Broadly speaking, organized sport is structured in ways that are highly gendered and privilege masculinity (Lenskyj 2003). Moreover, some sports cultures promote the idealization of thinness, which can result in a heightened preoccupation with body image for athletes (Heywood 2011). Dworkin and Wachs (2009) argue that with the rise of neoliberalism, there is increased pressure for individuals to scrutinize their bodies, self-regulate, and strive for health and fitness. These trends have resulted in healthism, which amounts to the widespread pursuit of health and fitness that is especially evident among the middle and upper classes (Dworkin and Wachs 2009). Nettleton and Hardey (2006:455) observe that the growing commodification of health has been accompanied by a growth in urban marathon running, which they characterize as "an educative spectacle that reflects the values of self-discipline and healthy lifestyles."

Although corporeal self-regulation occurs among both men and women, self-regulatory practices have a highly gendered component (Butler 1997; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Bartky 2009). Fitness regimes for women tend to emphasize weight loss, while men's fitness activities promote muscular development (Dworkin 2001). Additionally, women are judged more harshly on appearance and are encour-

aged to present themselves in conventionally feminine ways (Davis-Delano, Pollock, and Vose 2009). Dworkin's (2001) study on women's fitness practices reveals that many women are reluctant to exercise in ways that promote muscular expansion, creating a glass ceiling on women's muscular strength. Dworkin argues that this trend places an upper limit on women's muscular strength, thereby reproducing socially constructed understandings of female embodiment.

Emphasis on female slenderness, combined with the popular discourse of healthism, has resulted in a substantial preoccupation with weight for many women. That preoccupation has been accompanied by notable growth in the prevalence of disordered eating patterns, especially among young, white, middle-class women (Bordo 1993; Hesse-Biber 1996). Although there is substantial pressure for women, in general, to strive for thinness, that pressure is arguably intensified in some athletic subcultures where athletes are faced with additional performance-related pressures to lose weight. In this vein, Heywood's (2011) work uses a biocultural approach to examine how beauty ideals and gender prescriptions mesh with sports culture to produce *anorexia athletica*, a form of anorexia associated with excessive exercise. Heywood notes that performance-related idealizations of leanness stemming from sports subcultures can combine with appearance-related idealizations of leanness from the dominant culture, which can provoke body image anxiety among female athletes. That is especially true in leanness-promoting sports, such as running.

Heywood's research is consistent with literature suggesting that female athletes may be at higher risk for developing eating disorders compared to non-athletes (Swami, Steadman, Tovee 2009; Torst-

veit, Rosenvinge, and Sundgot-Borgen 2013; Quinn and Robinson 2020) and that higher levels of competition are associated with elevated rates of eating disorders (Smolak, Murnen, and Ruble 2000; Swami et al. 2009). For many runners, identity becomes increasingly tied to their athletic pursuits as their involvement in the sport grows (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2007; Shipway and Jones 2007). Heywood (2011) specifically notes that for competitive runners, identity becomes attached to the numbers produced by their performances, such as race times or rankings. That can heighten performance-related pressures to strive for leanness within athletic subcultures, a trend that may be exacerbated for female runners. Research suggests that female athletes in leanness-promoting sports are more apt to develop eating disorders (Nattiv et al. 2007; Swami et al. 2009; Javed et al. 2013; Quatromoni 2017). That finding is consistent with existing research suggesting that distance runners face elevated levels of eating disorders (Krebs et al. 2019; Quinn and Robinson 2020). For example, a recent study of NCAA cross country and track athletes identifies an elevated risk of eating disorders for both male and female runners compared to the general population, although the risk was found to be more than twice as high among female runners compared to male runners (Krebs et al. 2019).

Pressure to be thin stemming from performance-related goals, athletic subcultures, and broader societal idealizations of thinness may prompt female runners to engage in corporeal self-regulation. Although rationales for doing so may vary, the literature suggests that female runners may experience considerable pressure to self-regulate. Foucault (1977:138) argues that as individuals are exposed to surveillance, they engage in self-regulatory behavior, ultimately becoming what he calls "docile bod-

ies." According to that perspective, individuals internalize the corporeal discourses they are exposed to and become self-regulating. That trend is consistent with the scores of women who have adopted weight-loss strategies in a manner that mirrors the discourse of healthism and idealizations of thinness.

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. Foucault argues that dominant discourses are reproduced via disciplinary practices that are covertly embedded in all facets of society. As such, what are the specific mechanisms by which disciplinary practices operate in distance running? Moreover, how do female runners respond to the disciplinary practices to which they are subject?

Methods

The study is based on semi-structured interviews with nineteen female distance runners. A semi-structured interview style was chosen for its conduciveness to flexibility, allowing for greater depth in participant dialogue (Adler and Clark 1999). All of the interviewees fell under the category of middle-distance runners. "Middle distance" is defined as any race between 800 meters and five kilometers long. All of the interviewees were also intercollegiate cross country and track athletes, attending one of three Canadian universities used for recruitment. I focused on intercollegiate athletes because, like many elite-level runners, there is a tendency for them to form subcultures centered on their athletic involvement. University running in Canada is competitive, holding national cham-

pionships and drawing many of the country's top athletes. Many university athletes take their athletic pursuits seriously and dedicate much of their time and energy to their training. They spend countless hours in each other's company: traveling, competing, socializing, and sometimes even living together. Close relationships form between runners, and a subculture emerges as their athletic pursuits become central to their identities. Consistent with Eliasoph and Lichterman's (2004) concept of "group style," intercollegiate runners develop their culturally patterned styles of interaction based on their shared group membership. Given the sheer level of their athletic involvement, the experiences of competitive university runners may be different from those who run recreationally. Since I was interested in interviewing competitive runners who were familiar with both structural and subcultural elements of their sport, intercollegiate cross country and track provided a useful locale for a cultural examination of distance running concerning gender and corporeality.

In May of 2011, having received ethics board approval, I began recruitment. As a distance runner, I had connections to running communities in Nova Scotia and Ontario that facilitated the recruitment process. Participants were initially approached informally, and those who expressed an interest in participating were provided with a formal recruiting document. All of the participants in the study were either involved in competitive running at the university level or had been within the past two years of the interview. The interviews took place between July and September of 2011. Despite being collected in 2011, the data provide valuable insight into how the sport is experienced on a subcultural level. Moreover, the data reveal the structures and practices that reproduce dominant cultural ideals in distance running,

as well as identify how these have shifted over time. Notably, the data highlight recent developments in women's cross country and track at the international level and the intercollegiate level in Canada.

Being an insider to the group I studied had both benefits and drawbacks. First, there was the possibility that my insider status might interfere with my ability to interpret findings. As such, I was careful during interviews to listen to the stories as relayed by participants and to clarify any ambiguities with follow-up questions. A second consideration relates to the fact that my insider status influenced the communities and participants that I chose to study. Having access to running communities in both Ontario and Atlantic Canada, I chose these locations for my research. Finally, my insider status may have affected the degree of comfort participants felt in disclosing certain information. To minimize discomfort, I took specific measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, such as non-disclosure of names and specific locations. The fact that I recruited participants from two separate communities likely facilitated anonymity. Despite these challenges, however, the participants seemed eager to discuss their experiences. Perhaps my insider status was more of an asset than a hindrance, facilitating my rapport with participants and attuning me to important questions relating to the sport's subculture.

The participants shared several 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 and heterosexual. Most described their socio-economic backgrounds as middle-class, which is interesting given that distance running has been identified as a largely middle-class pursuit (Serravallo 2000; Abbas 2004). The

lack of racial diversity among the research participants was particularly notable. Although racial categories are socially constructed, the effects of these constructions merit attention. Coakley (2003) argues that racial stereotyping can help channel individuals into particular sports, producing racial segregation. That finding may be relevant to women's distance running, as the runners I interviewed noted a lack of racial diversity within the sport. They suggested that there is more racial diversity on the men's side and among sprinters, but observed very few non-Caucasian women in university cross country. The homogeneity of my research participants presents a major limitation to my study; however, it also raises important questions for further study regarding demographic trends within the sport and their implications for inequality.

The interviews centered on the experiences of the runners concerning training, competition, gender, and the body. With the permission of participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were selected for the participants, and identifying information, such as names and places, were removed from the transcripts. Following transcription, I analyzed the data thematically. I adopted a grounded theory approach that involved grouping similar concepts together and identifying common patterns and themes. Grounded theory is a dynamic approach that integrates data analysis throughout the research process and facilitates the development of a theory that is firmly grounded in the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

I began with an open coding process that involves systematically and thoroughly analyzing the data line-by-line to identify broad themes. That can involve writing notes in the margins of transcripts of

field notes and creating documents compiling relevant observations, ultimately identifying broad themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I engaged in both strategies, analyzing the interview transcripts and notes line-by-line to identify larger themes and subthemes. That process generated two overarching categories: (1) mechanisms of disciplinary power and (2) responses to disciplinary power. I created documents for these themes, compiling the relevant information provided by each of the participants. These documents listed all the relevant information from each participant on the specific theme addressed, which I referred to during subsequent coding and writing stages.

I also created documents to analyze the emergent subthemes. Early on, it became evident that various mechanisms operate in the sport of distance running in ways that uphold dominant discourses on gender and the body. Subthemes that emerged in this category were "self-surveillance," "peer surveillance," "coach surveillance," and "structural surveillance." These represent the central mechanisms by which dominant conventions of gender and the body are upheld in women's distance running. It also became evident that responses to these mechanisms are polarized, with participants expressing a mix of compliance and resistance. Thus, addressing the second overarching theme involved identifying how participants were compliant and resistant to the constraints they experienced within their sport.

Once the core analysis documents were created, I coded each emergent theme into smaller subthemes detailing the processes by which the participants experienced gendered and corporeal discourses in their sport. Consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach, I used axial coding to link categories and subthemes to glean further insights

and provide a fuller picture of their experiences and selective coding to refine and integrate the emergent themes.

Experiencing Discourses on Gender and the Body

Distance running is a sport where the pressure to be thin can be intense. The runners all claimed that there is substantial pressure for runners to be thin. Moreover, they specified that the pressure is intensified for female runners, who also face societal pressures to be thin. Haley, for instance, described the pressure she felt to be thin as double-layered, stating: "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...it's kind of like double thinness." Runners described how the pursuit of thinness is reinforced within their running subculture, but also noted that the dominant conventions surrounding femininity mandate thinness for women in general. They identified themselves, coaches, peers, and clothing as the sources of their body image anxiety.

In addition to promoting the pursuit of thinness, the runners described how their sport promotes conformity to conventional gender ideals more broadly. Distance running is structured in highly gendered ways; most notably, through shorter races for women and sex verification testing (at the international level). Some runners noted that the sport's subculture also emphasizes a need to maintain a conventionally feminine appearance. The runners described various ways in which they felt pressured to adhere to conventional feminine standards, citing demeanor, facial expressions, and appearance more broadly as specific examples. Some runners perceived contradictions between conventional femininity and ath-

leticism in general. Nicole, for instance, observed that female runners may be referred to as “beasts” or “tanks.” These are terms she perceived as unfeminine: “stuff like that; women wouldn’t normally want to hear about themselves.”

The interviews revealed how distance running promotes a particular brand of femininity that is largely embodied by the pursuit of thinness. The runners felt pressured in varying degrees to maintain a thin, conventionally feminine appearance within their athletic environments. In line with Foucault, that suggests that disciplinary power shapes distance runners into docile bodies that conform to dominant conventions on gender and the body. However, the runners were often aware of how dominant these ideals impact their sport, exhibiting a combination of self-regulation and resistance.

Mechanisms of Disciplinary Power

Self-Surveillance

Self-surveillance is central to disciplinary power and the production of docile bodies (Foucault 1977). As evidenced by the data, self-surveillance plays a key role in promoting a gendered pursuit of thinness among female distance runners. Consistent with Foucault’s theory of docile bodies, some runners described pressure to be thin as an internal manifestation and downplayed other factors that contribute to body image anxiety among runners:

There’s a lot of personal pressure, too, that I put on myself. [Ellen]

Pressure comes from coaches, but I think a lot of it comes from the runners themselves. [Nicole]

Part of the pressure is obviously from myself. [Brittany]

I think it’s internal. [Kayla]

The runners also conveyed that the culture of distance running facilitates self-surveillance, as weight-based assumptions about running ability are frequently made. Megan, for instance, felt the need to monitor her weight: “I will watch what I eat, try to run more because I feel like people are going to judge me just because I have a bigger body.” For Anna, pressure to be thin is exacerbated by being surrounded by thin people in her training circle:

Hanging out with basketball players or just friends, 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.

Self-surveillance was also evident in discussions about gender. For Haley, disparaging remarks about the bodies of female runners deemed too muscular caused her to become self-conscious of her body, especially when her lean physique gained disapproval from her boyfriend: “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.” Anna felt the need to control her facial expressions while running, which she felt detracted from her ability to direct 100 percent of her energy on performance:

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?!” I think that’s kind of held me back a couple of times. You don’t want to lose control of yourself or something. [Anna]

Anna's concentration during races was also inhibited by an urge to downplay competitiveness:

Sometimes I'll be really close to my teammates in a race, and it's 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, I don't know if they even consider that. I think it's a totally different mindset.

For Megan, tensions between femininity and muscularity have helped guide her sporting pursuits. A multisport athlete before joining her university cross country and track teams, Megan's 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. She felt that running is more consistent with feminine ideals, in part due to its promotion of bodily reduction: “it's more feminine because of the attire and the body types associated with running. They aren't as muscular and stuff.” For these athletes, gender conventions heightened their corporeal self-awareness, and in some cases, promoted self-regulation.

As stated by Foucault (1977), 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. All the runners stated that, to a certain degree, pressure to be thin is internal, although many also cited additional sources of pressure. Asserting that pressure to be thin is internal may indicate that surveillance practices have been internalized. The fact that many were cognizant of additional sources of pressure, however, indicates an awareness of this internalization.

Peer Surveillance

Although surveillance from coaches had a significant impact on the runners, peer surveillance also contributed to self-regulation. For some runners, pressure to be thin was rooted in performance. It was suggested that there is a common perception that weight control can improve performance, prompting bodily comparisons among runners. Kayla, for instance, perceived that weight is covertly monitored within her team environment:

It's kind of like that hush-hush thing you don't talk about. Like no one's ever like, “Oh, you've gained weight.” But, in the back of your 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.

Surveillance also influenced the dietary choices of some runners. Some runners described times when they felt pressure to alter their eating habits in the presence of others:

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. [Anna]

I feel like I'm conscious of what I'm eating. Like, I try not to overeat. I think like, everybody feels a bit of pressure with food, just to fit in with the team. [Alyssa]

Although dietary restriction was discussed at length, some athletes also described gluttony as a frequent topic of conversation within their training circles. Many claimed that because there is such a high prevalence of eating disorders among runners, they tend to take specific measures to disas-

sociate 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 to deflect suspicions of eating disorders:

People are always talking about all the food that they have eaten or that they're going to be eating, like junk food and stuff. 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. [emphasis original]

Kayla expressed a similar sentiment, stating that the prevalence of eating disorders has helped fuel the constant focus on food within her team environment: "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 monitoring encourages behavior 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:

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," and I already had lunch. In my mind, I feel the pressure to eat another lunch even if I feel sick.

By taking measures to control their appearance and manage their diets, especially in the presence of teammates, the runners demonstrate internalized docility. Their comments suggest that surveillance plays a key role in dictating the general focus on body image and weight within their sport's subculture.

Coach Surveillance

For the runners in this study, coaches played an integral role in promoting the pursuit of thinness. Besides from themselves, coaches were the most widely cited source of pressure to be thin. While it is important to note that many coaches do not engage in training methods that specifically draw attention to body weight, they are a subtle source of body image anxiety among female runners. Athletes shared stories of coaches commenting on their weight or the weight of other runners. Conversations about diet and "weigh-ins" were also cited as sources of body image anxiety stemming from coaches.

A few athletes described how weight-related comments made by their coaches about other runners contributed to the emphasis on weight control within the sport:

He would often comment on girls that didn't train with him anymore, but that moved on to a different coach and got bigger and stuff like that. [Jasmine]

I've had another coach mention to a girl...she said you need to start exercising and lose that weight. [Emily]

Haley described a situation in which her coaches asked her to speak to a teammate about her weight in hopes that the teammate would lose weight:

They wanted me to talk to a girl runner because she had gained weight. They wanted me to talk to her, and I didn't end up. I was like, that's not my place. [Haley]

Several runners were told directly by their coaches to lose weight. Nicole was told that she was "running with a ten-pound backpack." Olivia's club

coach would regularly tell his athletes that “pounds are seconds.” Ellen was told by club coaches to “watch what you eat.” As a high school student, Megan’s club coach spoke to her on several occasions about diet and weight. He would say things such as “you’re fat,” “you look heavy,” or “you have too much body weight,” and would also offer weight-loss tips. On one occasion, he even felt her body and told her where she needed to lose weight:

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.” [Megan]

That 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...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 bodyweight.”

Although some runners were resistant to their coaches’ emphasis on weight control, all of them described how weight-related remarks had a way of sticking with them and making them more self-conscious about their bodies:

I know I’m not overweight, but it makes me feel more self-conscious, you know what I mean? [Jasmine]

Because of that one time they talked about it, now I always feel like I’m being analyzed. [Ellen]

Ever since then it was always sort of at the back of my mind. Running with a ten-pound backpack on my back. [Nicole]

Well, it just stuck with me... I just can’t forget it. [Haley]

Every time I have a bad day, have a bad run, I always think of that. I feel like that’s always hanging over me now. I just can’t get it out of my system. [Megan]

For Anna, comments from coaches about diet and weight made her feel uncomfortable eating junk food in their presence, especially when traveling with her team:

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.

Comments remained embedded in their minds for a long time and surfaced every so often, causing them to think negatively about their bodies. By criticizing their athletes’ bodies, coaches made athletes more self-regulating and, in extension, docile. Commenting on an athlete’s weight affected workouts, food intake, and appearance consciousness, which ultimately led to high levels of surveillance and control within training environments.

Structural Surveillance

Numerous structures promote dominant conventions on gender and the body in distance running.

These include shorter races for female runners and sex verification testing, which promote the ideology of male physical superiority. Uniform requirements can serve as a means to promote corporal self-regulation and the idealization of thinness. By promoting gender dichotomization and the idealization of thinness, these structures constitute mechanisms of disciplinary power in distance running.

When asked about the sources of their body image concern, the runners identified clothing as a key contributor. The types of clothing that runners typically wear are form-fitting and do not cover much flesh. It was suggested by many that such clothing contributes to the pressure they feel to be thin. Several runners described how clothing made them pay more attention to weight and body composition. Megan described the feeling as though she is under the constant surveillance of others while wearing spandex, prompting her to tone her body. Megan's comments emphasized how clothing can 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.

Several runners professed a marked desire to look good in running clothes. Excess body fat spilling out of clothing was described as something that female runners seek to avoid. Their comments indicate a preoccupation with maintaining a lean physique that is closely linked with the clothing they wear:

If you look at pictures of yourself running, you want to look good. You don't want to make a fool of your-

self. 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. [Katrina]

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, indicating internalized docility.

Some runners discussed how some required team uniforms were too tight or too revealing for their taste. 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 also suggested that the trend of tight, form-fitting uniforms in distance running is not solely due to coach preference. Some coaches even accommodated their athletes' preferences by providing them with several uniform options. The trend of wearing form-fitting uniforms for the competition is embedded within the subculture of the sport on a deeper level. Form-fitting clothes are typically worn by competitive runners. Many of the runners preferred running in minimal cloth-

ing. 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, 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 self-regulation and weight control.

Another structure that promotes disciplinary power in the sport can be found in the race distance differential for men and women. In Canadian intercollegiate cross country, women's races have traditionally been significantly shorter than men's. At the time of the interviews, women's championship races were five kilometers long, while the race distance for men was ten kilometers. In recent years, however, there has been some debate over the differential race distances for male and female runners at all levels of competition. At the international level, the IAAF decided to equalize race distances in men's and women's championships (Hambleton 2021). While motions to equalize race distances were initially rejected by U Sports, the governing body for the intercollegiate sport in Canada, women's championship races were increased to 6 kilometers in 2013 and again to 8 kilometers in 2016, while the men's race distance remained unchanged at 10 kilometers. In 2020, U Sports decided to equalize the men's and women's race distances, requiring both men and women to run 8 kilometers in championship races (Hambleton 2021). Since the 2020 cross country season was canceled due to the global pandemic, the 2021 cross country season marks the first season in which both men and women will run 8 ki-

lometers at the national championship in November. Race distances still vary by gender in many locales, however, including some Athletics Canada events, some high school events, and American and British intercollegiate cross country.

There have been some efforts to address gender equity within the sport, as evidenced by race distance equalization. However, the legacy of gendered practices within the sport remains part of a larger culture of sexism observed by some participants, who at the time of the interviews still ran half the distance as their male peers. Thirteen of the nineteen runners interviewed described this race-distance gap as problematic. While most were not particularly bothered by running the shorter distance, the gendered disparity in race distance was commonly understood as irrational, and by some as a product of lingering gender stereotypes:

I kind of wonder why there is that big gap because I feel like there isn't really any need for that. I think it's probably traditional. [Jessie]

I would rather run a ten than a five. I'm not offended that we only run five, but I don't see why we couldn't run ten. [Haley]

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 the men. [Kara]

One runner insightfully noted that women are forced to run shorter races throughout their entire careers and are thus conditioned to appreciate the shorter distance. Although happy to run five kilometers, Megan stated that she would have preferred

the opportunity to “build up” and run longer races. Megan’s discussion illustrates how covert disciplinary practices can become normalized through repeated exposure.

Shorter race distances for women provide a clear example of a structural limitation that restricts female athleticism and maintains women’s inferior status within the sport. Historically, limiting women’s race distances served as a means to promote the “female frailty myth” that associates female bodies with physical deficiency (Lenskyj 2003; Mewett 2003). A Foucauldian analysis suggests that holding shorter race distances for women in CIS cross country helps preserve that myth. Limiting women’s race distances serves as a disciplinary practice that covertly promotes unequal gender relations within the sport.

Several runners identified sex verification testing as contributing to sexism in their sport, citing the high-profile testing of Caster Semanya that occurred in 2009 as a specific example. Until 2011, female runners remained subject to sex verification testing on a case-by-case basis at international competitions. Testing could be ordered when a “challenge” was issued by another athlete, team, or delegate (IAAF Policy on Gender Verification 2006). Appearance played a role in determining who was identified as a candidate for testing, encouraging female runners to present themselves in conventionally feminine ways (Cavanaugh and Sykes 2006). To deal with the eligibility of female athletes, the IAAF enacted a new policy in 2011 titled “IAAF Regulations Governing Eligibility of Female Athletes with Hyperandrogenism to Compete in Women’s Competition” (Cooky, Dycus, and Dworkin 2018:43). That new policy abandons all reference to “gender verification”

but still governs the eligibility of athletes to compete as women (Cooky et al. 2018).

Although they are not subjected to sex testing themselves, some runners suggested that the practice is sexist and expressed displeasure that appearance plays a role in the testing process. Moreover, they stated that the abilities of female runners become suspect when they perform well, noting a double standard between how male and female athletes are treated:

I think she was treated really badly...you think of Usain Bolt. 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 Usain Bolt is a guy, nobody tries to kick him out, and nobody tries to be like, “Oh, you can’t be in the competition.” But, in her case, they take her out of the competition. [Alyssa]

She is muscular, so they associate that with being male. That says a lot right there, just saying, “Oh, she has muscles, she can’t be a female.” 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]

These runners adopted a position similar to that argued by Cooky and Dworkin (2018), whereby sex testing is characterized as arbitrarily creating a narrow category of acceptable femaleness, policing the boundaries of sex.

Responding to Disciplinary Power

The runners had varied responses to disciplinary power in their sport. As illustrated by their statements, some succumbed to pressure to self-regulate. They controlled what they ate in the presence

of teammates and coaches and, in some cases, strove for leanness in response to perceived judgments from others. Megan, for instance, claimed to “watch what [she] eats and exercise more.” Others, like Kayla, felt the need to make a conscious display of eating to deflect suspicions of eating disorders. Most runners claimed that they felt pressure to be thin. A few initially claimed that they ignore pressure to be thin, but subsequently described how they altered their diets in the presence of teammates or coaches. One runner who was relatively unconcerned with her weight stated that one advantage of running is being able to eat larger quantities of food and remain thin. Similarly, runners who claimed to be unaffected by gender norms later complained about their shorter race distances or opined that sex testing is sexist. These contradictory messages reveal that athletes may be unaware of how they are affected by dominant discourses until taking time to reflect on their experiences. By providing contradictory statements, these participants highlight the subtle nature of disciplinary power. As Foucault (1977) asserts, surveillance mechanisms operate covertly, which promotes self-regulation and permits dominant discourses to become normalized. For some athletes, it was only upon deeper reflection that they were able to identify gender as a factor that shapes their experiences as runners, which exposes the power of gender discourse.

In most cases, however, the runners seemed well-aware of how they were influenced by the dominant discourses in their sport. Some were quite vocal in their opposition to gendered practices and corporeal surveillance. Notably, there was explicit resistance to the emphasis placed on weight control within their sport, especially in terms of the perceived associations between thinness and athletic success:

[Running] kind of has almost a strict sort of body type...which is 120lbs, very slim, very skinny, not an ounce of fat. But, I think that people are realizing that you don't need that type of body. [Megan]

A lot of people have the idea that the smaller you are, the better you're going to do, although I've realized that's only up to a point. Everyone has a set bodyweight that's best for them, and once you go under that, you're setting yourself up for all these different types of health complications. [Brittany]

In high school, I had that view that if I was thinner then I would run faster. But, I realize now that you don't have to be stick thin to be a good runner. [Karen]

There was also opposition to coaching practices that emphasize weight loss. Haley, for instance, refused to talk to a teammate about her weight, as requested by her coach. In reference to her coach's remarks about her weight, Megan pointedly stated: “I think it shouldn't ever be said. I feel like everyone makes their own decisions to run and when to run and what to eat and what not to eat.” Even runners who claimed to regulate diets and exercise to control their weight expressed resistance to the idea that runners should necessarily be thin. Moreover, some runners vocalized their displeasure with shorter races for women and sex verification testing, citing sexist traditions as the reasons behind these practices. Others requested alternative uniform options from coaches. 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.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper presents a discursive analysis of how disciplinary practices are subjectively experienced by intercollegiate female distance runners. Notably, the paper is attentive to the ways that runners resist the various mechanisms of disciplinary power that they are exposed to. The interview data reveal that despite substantial progress in women's sport, competitive distance running continues to uphold dominant conventions on gender and the body. Shorter distances for women's races and sex verification testing constitute key ways in which gender continues to affect the experiences of female distance runners in some locales. Moreover, distance running subcultures promote corporeal self-regulation among female runners, especially concerning weight. As many runners stated, running can intensify general societal pressures for women to be thin. Pressure to be thin stems from their athletic subcultures and Western society more broadly, creating a multilayered effect on weight control. Female runners are exposed to intersecting discourses that promote thinness and conventional femininity simultaneously. They are encouraged to adopt a brand of femininity that is largely centered on the thin ideal. Although thinness is valued in distance running for both men and women, thinness is particularly emphasized for female runners, who are expected to be thin both as runners and as women. Gender thus facilitates the imperative for female runners to lose weight.

The runners in this study demonstrated a combination of internalization and resistance to gender and corporeal discourses. While pressured to self-regulate, they also exhibited awareness, and sometimes even rejection, of the disciplining forces within their sport. That finding is consistent with Foucault's arguments that disciplinary power does not operate

unilaterally but rather serves as a subtle force by which dominant discourses are strengthened and maintained. Although aware of the constraints they faced, the runners in this study were compliant towards the dominant discourse to the degree necessary for continued participation in their sport. For these athletes, the surveillance and discipline they were subjected to did not overshadow the satisfaction they derived from running. The runners' love for their sport trumped any pressures they felt to conform to cultural ideals in ways that interfered with their participation. Runners with muscular builds continued to train, runners whose coaches commented on their weight took pride in their athletic accomplishments, and one runner even refused her coach's request to speak to a teammate about weight loss strategies. There was also a common understanding that the idealization of thinness is largely irrational. Finally, the runners demonstrated high levels of critical awareness, indicating that they were not passive recipients of disciplinary power. These findings reveal important ways that athletes actively resist disciplinary power, not only as coping mechanisms described in much of the literature (Markula 2003) but as transgressive practices. Critical awareness can be understood as resistance and constitutes an important first step towards change. As Foucault (1988b) argues, through critical awareness, individuals can start to develop technologies of the self and transcend disciplinary power.

Although disciplinary power encourages adherence to dominant corporeal discourses and facilitates the production of docile bodies, that does not occur in an authoritative manner that suggests blind compliance. Instead, discourses are simultaneously observed and resisted by individuals who are often very much aware of their influence. While distance running may outwardly appear as a site of excessive self-regu-

lation, elite female runners exercise varying degrees of resistance to corporeal disciplinary practices. And through these processes of resistance, cultural discourses and practices can be reshaped. Such an example can be observed with the recent race distance equalization movement in cross country at the national and international levels (Hambleton 2021). In Canadian intercollegiate cross country, for instance, the 2021 national championships will be the first in which male and female athletes race the same distance—a direct outcome of active resistance. In this case, resistance led to a re-evaluation of a gendered regulatory practice within the sport after years of vocal opposition to women's shorter races.

In sum, resistance enables us to see that while “docile bodies” is indeed a relevant concept for analyzing the production of dominant discourses, such analyses must consider individual agency and potential for self-awareness. More attention to agency and the micro-processes by which disciplinary power is enacted can facilitate a deeper understanding of how

cultural discourses are produced, maintained, and reshaped.

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