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Enduring or Stubbornness? What It Takes to Be a "Runner" With Physical Limitations

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Abstract

A plethora of literary and scholarly books and articles have been written on endurance sports such as long distance running and cycling and successful athletes within these endurance sports such as Paula Radcliffe, Haile Gebrselassie, and Jan Ullrich. Although these athletes certainly deserved the recognition they received, there is limited information on how every day individuals who attempt to engage in endurance sport who never achieve such stardom are observed, portrayed, or even recognized within the running community or with their own embodied identity. In this autoethnography, I explore the notion of what it means to be an endurance runner, particularly from the perspective of a person who was once able to run long distances, but currently "endures" what it takes to put one foot in front of the other with chronic physical limitations. I utilize Foucault's panopticon to frame this autoethnography as I navigate running experiences in my neighborhood, and the surveillance of others, in my struggle with my changing embodied identity. I argue that it is time to give voice to the individuals who are physically limited and potentially silenced or hidden, especially those who formerly were fully functional and able-bodied athletes and had to transition to a different form of sport or activity due to their chronic physical limitations.

Keywords

autoethnography, endurance running, physical limitations, panopticon, ankle-foot orthosis

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My eyes are locked on the pavement in front of me navigating my foot strike to avoid any debris, cracks, or bumps that may augment my running stride. I have studied the pavement of the 1.5-mile radius that encapsulates my neighborhood over the past couple of years, but I still keep my focus just in case. As I complete my third loop, I feel something all too familiar—a deep grip, like a vice, on my left hip flexor. *Why does this keep happening? I do my physical therapy (PT), I am wearing the brace, what more can I do to alleviate my hip flexor from seizing up? From stopping me in my running tracks? I just want to get back to running . . . to running without limitations.*

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A plethora of literary and scholarly books and articles have been written on endurance sports such as long distance running and cycling and successful athletes within these endurance sports such as Paula Radcliffe, Haile Gebrselassie, and Jan Ullrich. Although these athletes certainly deserved the recognition they received, there is limited information on how every day individuals who attempt to engage in endurance sport who never achieve such stardom are observed, portrayed, or even recognized or silenced within the running community or with their own embodied identity. Do individuals who complete one marathon or 50-mile bike event consider themselves to be an endurance athlete? How about individuals who consistently participated in endurance sport, yet had to decrease their level of participation due to age, injuries, physical limitations, or adult-onset disability—Are they *still* considered endurance athletes?

In the running world, there is quite a range as to what is considered to be an endurance runner and/or athlete. For example, Cassidy (2005) argued that Paula Radcliffe engaged in leisure activity, and that many exercise enthusiasts engage in exercise during their leisure time and quite often to gain health benefits. Building upon Cassidy's notion of distance running as a leisure activity, Shipway and colleagues (2008, 2012) formulated a typology of a distance running social world, which identified four different types of runners: (a) sporting "outsiders": individuals who have no interest in running but engage in other forms of sport; (b) "occasional," casual participants: have a basic interest of distance running and run sporadically for health and fitness purposes; (c) regular, recreational runners: might use running to complement other primary forms of sport/exercise/physical activity; and (d) experienced long distance running "insiders": members of a distance running club and are familiar with the rituals of that distance running community.

Autoethnography as Method

In this autoethnography, I explore the notion of what it means to be an endurance athlete, particularly from the perspective of a person who was once able to run long distances but currently "endures" what it takes to put one foot in front of the other with chronic physical limitations. I utilize autoethnography as method, because I attempt to share my personal experiences and journey with running within the cultural contexts

of running and able-bodied communities as well as "embrace vulnerability with purpose" (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013, p. 22). There are numerous scholars who consider autoethnography "self-indulgent" (Sparkes, 2002) or "self-conscious navel gazing" (Rinehart, 1998); however, many researchers (e.g., Bochner, Ellis, Frank, Lincoln) argue that autoethnographic writing allows the author to think and feel with the story being told rather than about it (Frank, 1995). This includes scholars such as Sparkes (1996, 2002) and Laurendeau (2011, 2014), who have written autoethnographies within and about sport and physical education. In the 2013 first edition of the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Jones, Adams, and Ellis identify five purposes of conducting autoethnography: (a) disrupting norms of research practice and representation; (b) working from insider knowledge; (c) maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better; (d) breaking silence/(re)claiming voice; and (e) making work accessible.

As this autoethnography is solely about my journey and me, I am able to work from insider knowledge about a person who enjoys and engages in running while having physical limitations that restricts my ability to be an endurance runner—this is based on how running communities identify and perceive endurance runners and how *I* identify and perceive myself. Through this autoethnographic process, I was able to unveil the pain, anger, fear, and frustration I have encountered over the past 16 years, and particular to this piece, this past year. As a former athlete and physical education teacher, it has been challenging to navigate my physically limited embodied identity, both personally and professionally. Although I was able to identify, voice, and process my personal experiences through this critical and reflective writing, I still struggle with my running identity and how to navigate my physical limitations as a person who thoroughly enjoys engaging in vigorous physical activity. My final purpose in engaging in autoethnography as a method is to provide you, the reader, with insight into my personal experiences and struggles with the hope that you will be able to identify, reflect upon, and navigate your very own. This is particularly true for those of you who question your own running identity, especially for those who endure physical limitations. There has been research conducted within disability studies and disability sport (Chin-Ju & Brittain, 2006; Groff & Zabrieske, 2006; Peers & Eales, in press; Smith, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2002, 2003, 2011; Tasiemski et al., 2004). However, much of this research has been focused on individuals who identify as having a disability. To this date, limited research has been conducted on endurance athletes or "regular, recreational runners" (Shipway & Jones, 2008; Shipway et al., 2012) who have physical limitations, but does not identity with or align with the definition of a nonable-bodied person.

Throughout this manuscript, I attempt to provide rich, thick description of my lived experiences as a "runner" with physical limitations. Within the vignettes, I utilize *italics* to highlight questions I pose to myself and a critique of my most honest thoughts and feelings. I believe that it is through this critical analysis of my self-reflexive process that gives merit to this autoethnography.

Navigating the Panopticon of My Neighborhood

Spring 2015

During a run in the neighborhood, I experience an unwanted interruption—both from my own physicality and from an unwelcomed visitor.

I find a visible, safe, clear space to stop and stretch. I place one knee down on the dewy, wet, cool grass and set my opposing foot flat on the pavement making a 90° angle with my leg. My shoulders and hips are square, and my back vertical to complete the alignment. I extend one arm straight up toward the sky and arch my back to get a deeper stretch. *Ah. I feel it releasing. I know that this stretch will allow me to run another half a mile to a mile.* I switch sides after a "quick" 30 s. Before the 1-min stop in my 6-mile run comes to an end, I see my white-haired, smiley-faced neighbor walk in my direction from across the street. *Great. I don't have time to talk today. It's just a pit stop. A brief stop in my run; in my endurance run. When will I be free to run outside of this neighborhood? I feel trapped within the panopticon (Foucault, 1979) of my neighbors.* He is halfway across the street when he shouts through his cackling laugh: "Hey, do you get better service by doing that?" My palms immediately start to sweat; the blood rushes to the surface of my face, and my body instantly becomes taut: "No, it's a stretch that helps me run," I grumble as I shakily rise to my feet and slowly take off with an unorthodox running gait. I use my peripheral vision as I run pass him avoiding making eye contact. He stopped in his tracks, mouth agape, as he clearly was not expecting such a curt response from his typically friendly neighbor.

For the first time since I started running around the neighborhood 6 years prior, I began to wonder how many neighbors have witnessed me running around the hood or observed my running gait alter and depreciate over recent years since my last back surgery in 2011. The foot drop. The loss of function. The step-slide, step-slide. The stretching/rubbing regimen. The bulky, black, noticeable brace. Yes, for the first time I realized how visible my running potentially was within my neighborhood, yet it was unverifiable as to who was looking at me within the panopticon that I created (Foucault, 1979).

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I live in a housing community located in a suburban area that is only 7 min away from the university. There are more than 100 houses in the development, which was built in an unorthodox clover shape that includes three cul de sacs, three main roads that formulate a triangle, a short side street with no outlet (the fourth "clover"), and a short road that transcends the middle. We have lived in this development for 6 years, and I have encircled the outskirt of the neighborhood hundreds of times. This running route is 1.5 miles in distance, the longest possible perimeter in the development, which covered all but the street through the middle. Due to my running route, I had high visibility when I exercised in the neighborhood, especially when I typically exercised early in the morning when many patrons in the neighborhood were leaving for work or school.

Foucault's (1979) panopticon is visualized as an annular building with a tower made of windows at the center that open to the inside of the ring or cells of a prison.

The supervisor was placed inside the tower to observe the inmates within the cells leaving these inmates under strict and disciplined surveillance as they were highly visible. Ultimately, the supervisor, regardless of who it is, exercises power for simply being in the tower. The establishment of power is based on being visible and unverifiable. According to Foucault, visib*le* is described as "the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon" (p. 201). *Unverifiable* is described as "the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (Foucault, 1979, p. 201).

Although there is an electrical tower in the neighborhood, no one is planted in a tower overlooking each household (i.e., cell) on a regular basis. Rather, each house is a tower of its own as the individuals from within it can observe and survey what transpires outside of the home. However, patrons outdoors do not have the ability to survey individuals within the confines of their "tower," thus, giving power to the people living within the 100+ homes in the neighborhood. I was well aware that each time I stepped foot outside of my front door, I became visible, which opened up the possibility of being under surveillance by others and granting them, most likely without knowing, power. According to Foucault (1979),

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constrains of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (p. 202)

Although I knew I was subjecting myself to the possibility of gaze and surveillance from my neighbors, both from those in which that I saw (e.g., walking, driving, hanging out in their yards = visible) and even more so from those whom I did not (i.e., verifiable); the thought of not running was more concerning than the potential critique and judgment from my neighbors.

Ankle Foot Orthosis (AFO): An Enduring Possibility or Potential Stigma

February 2015

I felt my physicality was deteriorating, both in my everyday movements and with running, which frustrated and concerned me. I reached out to my neurosurgeon who recommended that I make an appointment with a neurologist to get assessed.

The room seems all too familiar. The spring green patient table. The out-of-date computer station. The scratched up, whitish-gray linoleum with a taint of black smear was the final piece in making me wonder how I could possibly be in one of the top hospitals in the country. A few minutes later, a short, petite, long-haired woman burst into our room with her white coat tailing behind her as if she is a superhero about to embark on a conquest:

> Hi, I am Dr. Monk, you must be Jen. Very nice to meet you. Dr. Ultra has updated me on your latest numbness, tingling and the issues you are having when you run. Talk to me about what is going on.

What seemed like a long soliloquy, I enlighten her on the three herniated disks I have in the lumbar region of my back, the three back surgeries, the physical limitations as a result of the last foot function loss and my running woes. "How about trying Tai Chi or Chi Gong?" was her simple, practical response to my elongated history of my failed back and body (Fisette 2015a, 2015b; Sparkes, 1996). *Is she freaking serious? Tai Chi? Chi Gong? I need to sweat. I need to run. Nothing compares to the intensity, the workout, the feeling of running no matter how slow I am running these days. I thought Dr. Ultra said she was amazing and would help me. This is a waste of my time. I am a runner. At least I want to be a runner and I want to return to the endurance runner I once was before this spinal problem occurred that has caused me to have an altered gait, which is clearly affecting my running performance.* I don't let on that I am not in approval of her suggestions. I side glance over at Theresa. Our eyes meet for a brief moment. Although attentive and open to the doctor's suggestions, the simple raise in her eyebrow confirms my thoughts and feelings.

After another 30 min of circular discussion and a brief cameo appearance by Dr. Ultra, she identifies the problem that is causing my hip flexor to seize up—foot drop, the loss of function in my foot. *Um, we knew that didn't we? Why is this a revelation?*

> The only way you can run is if you wear an AFO. You are young. If you continue to run without an AFO, you will begin to cause problems in your knees, hips and other regions of your body. This is your only option.

I felt a twinge in my stomach when she emphatically announced this. Running may not be an option for me as my primary form of exercise anymore. But, running MAY still be an option. Running was still on the table. An AFO is an ankle-foot orthosis—a carbon-made brace that fits into the insert of your shoe, with a long neck that connects to the back support where your calf nestles into the brace (Schwartz, 2014). It's visible. Very visible. An AFO would make my physical limitations even more visible, more prominent than they were: "If an AFO is what I need to run, then I will do it." *I would do anything to be able to run. And not just run, but to run without the fear of not knowing when the hip flexor was going to seize up, to run continuously and without having to stop to stretch and to run for endurance. I may not be an experienced long distance runner, but I am more than Shipway and colleagues' description of a regular, recreational runner, even though, isn't that what I am?*

I had restored hope and optimism that this brace would "fix" me (Frank, 1995). According to Frank (1995), based on his research on individuals with illness and issues with the body, I would then become part of the remission society.

Six weeks later, I was sporting my new AFO as I trotted around the hood.

I was determined to endure whatever it took to get back to running.

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Initially, I was self-conscious wearing the brace. I only wore it whenever I would run for exercise or walk more than a half a mile consecutively as it not only helped me perform a heel strike with every step but also stabilized my knees, hips, and shoulders. From behind, someone would no longer be able to identify my altered gait or limp even if they were well aware of my physical limitations. Fitting the brace into my then sneaker made a calcification develop on the top of my left foot the size of a golf ball, because my shoe had become snugger. For me to wear the brace, I had to purchase a new pair of sneakers and shoes at a larger size from an orthodic shoe store. I was concerned about whether my colleagues, neighbors, friends, and family looked at me differently for wearing "grandfather-type" shoes as well as this bulky brace. At work, I selected dress pants or khakis that would easily go over the brace even if that meant that the new shoes did not match the pants. In the neighborhood, I continued to run with my head looking down to the ground feeling even more like an imposter to the running community than I already did before I got the brace. Actually, I felt like a leper, because within the panopticon of my neighborhood, I was concerned with being branded as different and ultimately surveyed and categorized as abnormal, which results in the dualistic mechanism of exclusion when compared with normalcy (Foucault, 1979). *Why am I so concerned with what others think of me? Why should it even matter, especially my neighbors, many of whom I have never seen, never mind know their name, or have some form of "neighborly" relationship? And, why would they want to critique my physicality and running ability, especially if they are not runners or physically active themselves?*

June 2015

The warmer temperature had arrived. In another run around the neighborhood, I was reminded of my physical limitations through an encounter with a neighbor.

"Hi there! What happened? Are you okay?" bellowed the former Chief Deputy Sheriff to me as I jogged into the cul de sac. This neighbor walks throughout the hood in his crocs every morning, so we frequently pass each other during our morning exercise routines. *Does he think something's wrong, because I am jogging slower than I used to before the brace? Before the surgery? I feel like I look pathetic as I continue to try and run despite my significant decline in my physicality. I have been too nervous to leave the neighborhood for months so only run multiple repeats of the 1.5-mile loop and often wonder if my neighbors question my ability to run due to my nontraditional running gait and slow speed. Is he going to out me for not being a runner? An endurance runner?* I quickly came to a halt and began to jog in place, because I strongly dislike stopping during my runs. "Yeah, I'm fine, why do you ask?" I expressed with a whimsical look on my face. "Well, you are wearing that thing on your leg. Did you hurt your leg or foot or something?"

Ah, the brace. Since I have been wearing the brace for a few months I completely forgot about it. The brace was not exposed to the public eye, because I was in my basement due to the weather being poor and when I did run outside during the cold and

rainy spring, I wore running pants. The brace was hidden. On this June day, I was in shorts, revealing the brace that runs from just under my knee down into my sneaker: "Oh yes, my leg and foot are fine. The brace helps me walk and perform a heel strike, since I have loss of function in my foot and lower leg due to my chronic spinal issues." We talk for another minute or two, and then we both return to our physical activity. *In that moment, I realized that the stigma of what I initially associated with wearing the brace had depreciated. At least, it didn't consume as much of my consciousness as it did during the first couple of months. Instead, I focused more on whether I could get back to endurance running . . . if this brace would allow me to run longer distances again . . . and, if a person wearing such a brace would be accepted within the running community and/or at running events.*

The fear and concern for being "outed," combined with an essence of surprise when I was asked about the brace, made me realize that I had passed (Goffman, 1963) the previous couple of months without ever knowing that I had. The basement, similar to Foucault's (1979) reference to the dungeon, poses as the opposition to the panopticon of the neighborhood since the functions of basements and dungeons are "to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide" (p. 200). Since 2011, I had been referring to the limp due to my partial paralysis as a stigma because it was quite visible to anyone that paid attention. However, that stigma was rectified with the brace as I gave the impression that I was my restored self (Frank, 1995); yet, I subconsciously shifted the initial stigma of my partial paralysis and limp to the visible and open to surveillance brace (Foucault, 1979; Goffman, 1963). This new physical, concrete visibility, as well as the performance in accordance with it, caused me to feel trapped within the panopticon of my neighborhood.

Enduring the Pain and Diagnosis

My running woes were consistent but were diminishing in a very slow manner. I had days where I could run without stopping and even times when my trot felt more like a jog or even a run. Unfortunately, I was halted in my running tracks once again.

August 17, 2015

My hip flexor continued to plague me all throughout the summer, but I felt that maybe, just maybe I was turning a corner in my running as I was able to piece together some 6-mile runs without having to stop. *Was this distance long enough for me to be considered an endurance runner? AFO and all? I mean, I get that I "literally" am running an endurance distance, but in "reality," many, if not most, endurance runners would not view 6 miles as a long distance* (e.g., Collinson, 2005; Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Hockey, 2005; Smith, 1998 who identified as runners but sustained injuries that prevented them from running at the level they identified as "real" runners: faster than 9-min pace, run more than 6 miles and participating in running events). I began to visualize running outside of the neighborhood and building up to a 10-mile run. I could taste it. I was pumped. Unfortunately, that euphoric dream unraveled rather

quickly. My hip flexor began to bother me again, not only during my runs but also throughout the day. The nagging hip flexor didn't stop me from going out in the early morning to encircle the neighborhood 4 times. By this point, I was accustomed to the start and stop over the course of my run, which sadly had become routine. *The AFO had actually slowed me down between 60 and 90 s per mile and my hip flexors still seized up after 4 to 5 miles. I was tempted to chuck the brace, but would my performance be worse without it? Would I be causing more harm? Would I have to give up running? I wasn't willing to take that chance.* But this time when my hip seized, it wasn't tightness; rather, it felt like someone took a dagger and stabbed me deep within my hip flexor. I stopped and immediately went to the side of the road to stretch. I bent my knee to lower my body, but the stabbing intensified causing me to abort the stretch. I tried to erect my body into a standing position, but I remained hunched over. With quick, repetitive movements, I rubbed my hip flexors, hoping that they needed to be worked out just a bit and I would be on my way. After only three steps, the sharp pain alerted me that my run was over.

August 22, 2015

"I will accept not being able to run for the rest of my life if I never have to endure this pain again," I express to my wife, as I lay tensely on my left side on top of piles of ice on the living room sofa. The hip pain that occurred a week ago during my run turned into debilitating pain. I could not walk, stand, or sit without excruciating pain radiating all down the left side of my body. I felt desperate. I was miserable. I wanted someone to alleviate my pain in any way possible. Running was the least of my worries. A "runner," a possible "endurance athlete" I was no longer. Instead, I was debilitated and dysfunctional, and trying to endure my reality as a person with spinal problems.

September 5, 2015

The morning sky was crystal clear blue, and the end of the summer temperature was mild. It was a perfect weather for a weekend run. In my shorts and t-shirt, I attempted to put one foot in front of the other, not to run, but to walk unassisted around the half-mile block in the neighborhood. As I waved goodbye to Theresa and Harper as they embarked on the full 1.5-mile journey, I felt a familiar feeling percolating within me. It caused me to extend the push off of my toes a bit deeper and hitch my opposing knee higher. *I just want to break out into a trot, take off on a run. Do you think it would be ok? I asked no one.* I quickly halted my daydream and came back to reality—the reality where I was diagnosed with a reherniation of my L3-L4 disk that was previously operated on in 2011 along with spinal stenosis for the first time. The disk herniation was large in size. A fourth spine surgery was a possibility. *No. Don't run. Don't be greedy. Just a week ago you were in so much pain you could not walk.* Even though I am fully cognizant about my diagnosis and felt as if I was walking with a ticking time bomb in my back, the thirst to run was ever present. The hope that maybe, just maybe I could run again sometime in the near or distant future as a newer version of my

restored self (Frank, 1995), which was a similar hopeful feeling of former athletes who experienced a disability through sport (Smith, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2008, 2012).

Endurance, Enduring, or Stubbornness?

The progress and process are slow, but I eventually returning to jogging—in the dungeon on the treadmill and eventually around the neighborhood.

November 2015

The sad reality is, I have no idea if I will ever run again. Trotting, jogging, running are a possibility, but after 2 months of waiting and seeing what the disk decides to do I am still only allowed to do low-impact physical activity and am limited in the amount of physical exertion I can do. The more poignant issue, aside from my diagnosis, is that I have the desire to endure whatever it takes to run. To run almost every day of the week. To run longer distances—even if there will be negative ramifications as a result of it. To run despite the stigma that I used to associate with my foot drop (Goffman, 1963) and now the visible brace I wear in the panopticon of my neighborhood, of the social world, of my failed body (Fisette, 2015a, 2015b; Sparkes, 1996). Does this make me stubborn? Does this demonstrate my tenacity and persistence? Or am I trying to endure what is left of my able-bodied being as a runner and former athlete?

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The paragraph above was my concluding remarks in a presentation I delivered at the 2015 North American Society of Sport Sociology Annual Conference. When I wrote that paragraph, a week or two before the presentation, I had not attempted to trot, jog, or run a single step. However, the week before the conference, on a hike with my family and neurosurgeon, he agreed to allow me to "go very slowly on the treadmill for 20 minutes." Trepid and nervous, 2 days after the green light was given, I stood on the treadmill in my basement. I stared at the electrical board. The power was on. All I had to do was press start. I hesitated. *Am I really ready for this? Will this cause the tingling, numbness, and debilitating pain to resurface? Is it really worth the risk? Why do I hold onto running so much since I simply do it because I enjoy the feel of my body working and exerting force within the parameters that my body allows? It's not as if I am a "real" runner—someone who is naturally gifted, is fast, runs many miles a week, competes in races and events* (as described by Collinson, 2005; Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Hockey, 2005; Smith, 1998) *or according to Shipway and colleagues' experienced long distance running "insiders" who are typically members of a distance running group. I mean, I have run half marathons and two marathons before, but that was before the third surgery, before the paralysis and loss of function.* I press start. I walk for 5 min, and then increase the speed to 4.6 mph. I shake and wobble, as if my lower extremities did not know how to trot, as if I was a toddler learning how to walk and run for the first time. *I don't think I will be able to make 5 min, never mind 20. What has happened to me? I am ONLY going 4.6 mph! Many people can walk this pace! Just stop and walk or get off the treadmill. What's the point anyway?* But, I

couldn't and didn't. Not because I had a coach instructing me to go the full 20, but because stubbornness and determination are ingrained deep within me, especially when there is a target or goal to be achieved. Foucault (1979) would argue that in reference to the panopticon, my stubbornness was an attempt to distinguish myself from laziness. In knowing myself, I do not believe that is the case; however, my stubbornness could be associated with my desire to endure repeated frustration with my failed body (Fisette, 2015a, 2015b; Sparkes, 1996) in an attempt to be part of the running community as runners are fit, healthy, able bodied, and have the opportunity to accomplish performance goals. I felt running was my only opportunity to still engage in some form of athletics or athleticism as I was stripped of playing any form of sport—recreationally or competitively—when I was 22 years old.

January 2016

I step out my front door, walk down the steep driveway, and look all around me to see if any neighbors are out and about in the hood. It's been a while since I have trotted the 1.5-mile course. And, this time, I have to jog even *slower* than I was previously. The lack of tread. Ability to elongate my stride (which is rather short due to having tightened hamstrings as a result of them protecting my back). Being out in the open air and environment. All of it confirmed why I continue to endure one setback and limitation after another just to have the opportunity to run. I am focused on the pavement in front of me, being sure that I go slower than usual, trying exceedingly hard to deflect any negative thoughts that come my way. A half a mile in I begin to ascend the short, gradual "hill" of the neighborhood. My heart pounds my chest rapidly; my breath is more labored. Over the past 2 months, I slowly increased my speed from 4.6 mph to 5.0 mph, and my time from 20 min to 30 min; however, all of it was done on a treadmill in the basement. *Damn, I am really out of shape! My fitness has really declined over the past three and a half years. In all honesty, I feel embarrassed, as if I am one of the many individuals who made a New Year's resolution to exercise. Have I become your typical, average, exerciser? Someone who hops on an elliptical a few days a week, lifts some weights, and attempts to run a bit here and there (i.e., "occasional," casual participants, Shipway, 2008, Shipway et al., 2012)? I am a long way from being a runner, never mind an endurance runner.*

I jogged 3 miles that day and a week or two later, I jogged 4. I felt pumped for running 4 miles and disgruntled that I was barely able to make that mark. I simply cannot let go of the fact that 4 years prior; I was running a minimum of 40 miles a week. At that time, I still did not partake in a running group, as I was not fast or strong enough to keep up with them but did participate in some running events. And now, I vow to not run in any events, and I also resist the thought of running with *anyone* recreationally. I don't want anyone to see how much I struggle, to see how hard it is for me, how out of shape I am or hold anyone back from obtaining the exercise intensity and level of performance in which they desire. Yet, isn't all of this so very visible within the panopticon of my neighborhood? Can *they* see me struggle? Do *they* know I am not fit? Do *they* identify me as nonable bodied? Do *they* ever record the distance and amount of time I run to judge whether I am an endurance runner or not?

The reality is, many individuals who run, exercise for health or play sport are self-conscious about others surveying and judging them, whether it is about their performance (e.g., Am I good enough?), their body (e.g., Do I look the part?), or their functionality (e.g., Am I able bodied enough to participate?). In a socially constructed, mediated, panoptic world, exercise novices, enthusiasts, and elitists will encounter surveillance and critique by others and from themselves, similar to Foucault's (1979) disciplinary mechanism in relation to the panopticon:

> This Panopticon, subtly arranged so that any observer may observe, at a glance, so many different individuals, also enables everyone to come and observe any of the observers. The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole. (p. 207)

In my circumstance, the panopticon of my neighborhood is self-constructed. I have given the power to all of my neighbors, whether known or not, to observe and judge my running ability and me. How self-absorbed am I that I would believe that they would pay so much attention to me and my running day after day after day. Foucault (1979) would argue that it is the "power of mind over mind" (p. 206). I gave my neighbors the power to survey and judge me, not because of my visibility, but because I questioned, doubted, and compared myself with others, to the socially constructed ideals, to arbitrary labels that were established by . . .? Through engaging in this auto-ethnographic writing process, I have come to realize that I am the supervisor within the tower *and* the prisoner within the cell. Physical limitations or not, I have the power, the opportunity, the stubbornness, and the ability to endure whatever it takes to be an endurance runner.

At least, I hope.

Concluding Remarks

My personal experience and story may or may not be similar to other individuals who were former athletes who experienced a chronic injury or an adult-onset disability. Collinson, Hockey, and Smith are avid runners who documented their experiences with injury and the long road to recover (Collinson, 2005; Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Hockey, 2005; Smith, 1998). Scholars have conducted research on individuals who have sustained an injury in sport; some of whom resulted in a disability, such as spinal cord injuries (Laurendeau, 2014; Smith, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2002, 2003, 2011; Tasiemski et al., 2004). Yet, despite this plethora of research, there is limited research that has focused on physically active individuals who have physical limitations but have not identified themselves as non-able bodied. One of the reasons that this may be so is because such individuals may have been silenced or are hidden.

I argue that it is time to give voice to the individuals who are physically limited, especially those who were formerly fully functional and able-bodied athletes and

had to transition to a different form of sport or activity due to their chronic physical limitations. Are they, like me, worried about what others will perceive them as or question their own identity in related to their sport or activity? Are they hiding in dungeon-like spaces and are unverifiable (Foucault, 1979), or are they secure in their changed embodiment to be visible to others, whether in the confines of their own neighborhoods, in the streets, parks, or fitness centers, or at running and sporting events? I believe it is important to give voice to all individuals, and specific to this work, physically active individuals who have the desire to push themselves to new and different limits even if those limits are different than what they were previously able to accomplish. We can often become inundated with socially constructed ideals and perceptions, and allow others, including scholars (e.g., How Collinson and Hockey's research influences my identity as a runner?) to influence our embodied identities. The power is within us to deconstruct these ideals and perceptions to keep putting one foot in front of the other as physically active, physically limited adults. The time is now to give voice to those who have been silenced, are hidden, or do not understand their own feelings and emotions that are influenced by outside stereotypes and ideals. The power lies not in the silence and seclusion but in the voice of your own stories and experiences.

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