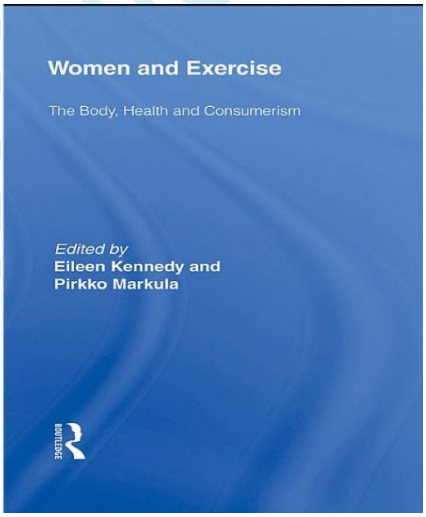
Author's accepted version (may contain typographical errors)

Full citation:

Allen-Collinson, J (2010) Running embodiment, power and vulnerability: Notes towards a feminist phenomenology of female running, in E Kennedy and P Markula (eds), *Women and Exercise: The Body, Health and Consumerism*, London: Routledge, pp, 280-298.

Running Embodiment, Power and Vulnerability: Notes towards a Feminist Phenomenology of Female Running

Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, PhD



Prof J Allen-Collinson, Director, Health Advancement Research Team, University of Lincoln, UK. Twitter: HART
E: jallencollinson@lincoln.ac.uk

Running Embodiment, Power and Vulnerability: Notes towards a Feminist Phenomenology of Female Running

Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson

Over the past twenty-five years the sporting body has been studied in a myriad of ways including via a range of feminist frameworks (Hall 1996; Lowe 1998; Markula 2003; George 2005; Hargreaves 2007) and gender-sensitive lenses (e.g. McKay 1994; Aoki 1996; Woodward 2008). Despite this developing corpus, studies of sport only rarely engage in depth with the 'flesh' of the lived sporting and exercizing body (Wainwright and Turner 2003; Allen-Collinson 2009) at least from a phenomenological angle, and in relation to female embodiment. It seems that a more corporeally-grounded, phenomenological perspective on women's sporting embodiment would be a welcome addition to extant studies. In this chapter I suggest that employing a feminist phenomenological framework can provide a powerful lens through which to explore the subjective, richly-textured, lived-body experiences of sport and exercise. Phenomenology of course offers only one of a multiplicity of avenues to investigate the body in sport, and this chapter provides just a small glimpse of its possibilities. To-date studies of sporting experience employing a phenomenological theoretical framework remain surprisingly under-developed (Kerry and Armour 2000), as do those using its ethnomethodological offspring (Coates 1999; Burke et al. 2008). Further, as Fisher (2000) notes, the significance of the interaction between phenomenology and feminism has only relatively recently begun to be explored. It seems timely, therefore, to address this intriguing, potentially productive, but sometimes uneasy nexus, focusing upon female running embodiment in this case.

With some notable exceptions (for example, Young 1980, 1998; Rail 1992), there is a relative lack of research on women's experiences of sporting/exercizing embodiment utilizing an explicitly phenomenological theoretical framework. Methodologically-speaking too, a phenomenological approach can offer insightful avenues into female sporting experience. In this chapter, I link feminist phenomenological theoretical perspectives with phenomenology as method, employing what has been termed 'autophenomenography' (Allen-Collinson 2009; Gruppetta 2004), described below, to examine my own situated experience of female running in 'public' space. While this experience is certainly lived and felt at the subjective, individual level, it is also structurally shaped by my/our "women's inability to secure an undisputed right to occupy that space" (Hanmer & Saunders 1984, 39). To consider some of these complexities, the chapter is structured as follows. I begin with a brief portrayal of phenomenology as both theoretical and methodological perspective. Two research projects are then described, and key themes emergent from the data are portrayed in relation to my lived-body experiences of the paradoxes and tensions of the vulnerable but also powerful female running body. I first consider the ways in which feminist existential phenomenology in particular can offer us distinctive insights into women's sporting embodiment.

Phenomenology, Feminism, Existentialism

Described as perhaps the major philosophical movement of the twentieth century (Embree and Mohanty 1997), modern phenomenology, founded by the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), now constitutes a wide-ranging, multi-stranded theoretical and methodological approach. In general, phenomenology focuses upon subjectivity, and accords primacy to lived experience. Seeking to transcend mind/body dualism, it examines embodied experiences and aspires to reveal the 'essences' of phenomena, the essential – but always situated - structures of experience. Very different ontological and

epistemological positions underlie the many, complex strands of phenomenology; in Ehrich's (1999) evocative metaphor, its 'tangled web'. Transcendental, existentialist, and hermeneutic phenomenologies, for example, all have distinctive but inter-relating perspectives (see Allen-Collinson 2009 for a general overview in relation to sports studies). Existentialist phenomenology, and the oeuvre of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in particular, have engaged extensive feminist theoretical attention (e.g. de Beauvoir 1972; Fisher and Embree 2000; Olkowski and Weiss 2006; Coy 2009). Indeed, Fisher (2000) posits that of the earlier 'founding phenomenologists', Merleau-Ponty is the most discussed and drawn upon by feminist writers.

My focus in this chapter is on the ways in which phenomenologically-inspired insights, in combination with feminist theory, might be brought to bear on the study of specific, situated, gendered sporting experiences. In common with existential phenomenologists, feminist theorists (see for example, Grosz 1995) have subjected to trenchant critique the dominance of 'reason' and the systematic denial of the importance of the body in human experience. Criticisms have, though, been levelled at some forms of phenomenology for insufficient analytic attention to 'difference,' including gender, and the social-structural influences and constraints upon individuals. Forms of more sociologized or 'cultural phenomenology' (Csordas 1994), including feminist phenomenology, explicitly recognize the structurally-influenced, historically-specific, and culturally-situated nature of human experience, along with the importance of intersubjectivity and 'intercorporeality' (Merleau-Ponty 2001). For, as Weiss (1999) notes, our experience of embodiment is never a private affair, but always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies. Csordas' (2002) concept of 'somatic modes of attention' is apposite to my analysis here, as it focuses on the "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in

surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (2002, 244). In the current analysis, this includes my corporeal dealings with the presence of other, sometimes threatening and harassing, bodies.

Although departing in some ways from original Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, more 'sociologized' forms of phenomenology interweave insights from other theoretical traditions such as feminism (Young 1980, 1998; Bartky 1990; Butler 2006), and queer studies (Ahmed 2007). Here I focus upon the ways in which feminist phenomenology offers powerful analytic insights into female sporting embodiment. Although 'traditional' existential phenomenology has sometimes been accused of taking as tacit norm the masculine (white) body, Merleau-Ponty's work nevertheless has been adapted and utilized inventively and productively by feminist scholars when addressing female lived experience (e.g. Weiss 1999; Butler 2006; Olkowski 2006). Indeed, de Beauvoir signalled the importance of his writings to feminist thought, and her work provides a classic intersection of feminism and phenomenology in addressing gendered being-in-the-world. Kruks (2006, 35) argues that, in spite of his sexism, Merleau-Ponty's account of the pre-personal body can in fact help us grasp significant aspects of human existence that span distinctions such as class, race, and gender. Conversely, with regard to those very differences, Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology, aligned with feminist theory, allows for conceptions of bodies and action as highly situated, socially-related, and interacting from particular structural standpoints.

Furthermore, existentialist phenomenology offers a 'third way' ontologically- and epistemologically-speaking, for it starts not from the assumption of an objective world 'out there', nor from a pure, constituting consciousness, but rather from their dialogical relationship. The world, body, and consciousness are fundamentally intertwined and inter-related. One's own body (*le corps propre*) is the subject of perception, the

instrument of human grasp on the world (de Beauvoir 1972). As Mensch (2006, 73) notes, our awareness has a "first-person character" and is always from a particular point of view, a "hereness" specific to ‘me.' Perception, a key concern for Merleau-Ponty, is portrayed as an active, creative receptivity. Phenomena are not merely abstract things ‘out there,' separate from our experience, but form part of our human incarnate subjectivity. We have existential unity with the flesh (chair) of the world, and can experience phenomena at a deeply corporeal, pre- (perhaps ultra-) linguistic level. This is powerfully illustrated by Pace’s account of her father’s death: "Bodies respond, often before thoughts enter the mind. Narratives materialize, fear pours over flesh, stealing breath and flattening the world. I felt as though I had no language" (2009, 411-412). Similarly, as Alcoff (2000, 47) notes in considering feminist phenomenology, experience is sometimes "inarticulate," exceeding language.

For the in-depth portrayal of our corporeally-grounded experiences of sport and physical activity, Merleau-Ponty’s form of existentialist phenomenology is particularly well-suited, given his interest in embodied consciousness, perception, intentionality (described below), and the ways in which we experience lived spatio-temporality. The following studies provide a flavour of how his work has been used utilised in examining sports and physical cultures. In relation to the time-space nexus, for example, Masciotra et al. (2001) provide a detailed phenomenologically-grounded account of spatio-temporal ‘distancing’ and co-ordination in Karate. The dialectical relationship between ‘player-body-subject’ and the lived-space of the playing field has been evocatively portrayed in relation to ‘the beautiful game’ of (male) soccer, and the ‘silky touch’ aesthetics of star players (Hemphill, 2005). Merleau-Ponty’s work has been taken up by various scholars examining mind-body practices and physical cultures. Samudra (2008), for example, portrays kinaesthetic experiences in Silat Bangau Putih, a Chinese Indonesian self-

defense and health system, whilst Morley (2001) examines yoga practice and breath-control, utilising some of Merleau-Ponty's constructs relating to the lived body, whilst also drawing comparisons between the practice of yoga and phenomenology itself, including in relation to 'bracketing' (see description below). Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's framework of embodied consciousness and being-in-the-world, McDonald (2007) considers Kalarippayattu, a martial art of southern India, and the politico-philosophical significance of corporeal activity. Addressing sports and physical activity more generally, Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007) explore the sensory dimension of the sporting body and the centrality of sense perceptions, employing Merleau-Ponty's (2001) work on the body as subject of perception. Before proceeding to describe the sports-related research on which this chapter is based, for those unfamiliar with phenomenological tenets, I give a basic portrayal of some key qualities within the phenomenological method.

The Phenomenological Method

The phenomenological method, for many, is the phenomenological approach itself (Kerry and Armour 2000). This 'method' is, however, perhaps more accurately described as a phenomenological attitude, an orientation to the world, an attitude of openness and attentiveness, rather than any particular set of prescribed techniques or procedures. Indeed lively debates flourish amongst phenomenologists as to how best to undertake this form of research (see Finlay 2009). In general, our aim is to provide rich, textured, complex descriptions of phenomena as they are lived and experienced in actual situations. Four key themes or qualities, derived originally from Husserlian phenomenology, provide a useful starting point in my brief consideration of the phenomenologcal method: 1) description 2) epochē and reduction 3) essences, and 4) intentionality. I then proceed to

describe the actual methods utilised in my own phenomenologically-inspired research projects.

For phenomenologists, description is a core concern, but may have very different meanings according to the particular phenomenological framework adopted. It is perhaps more useful to think of this in terms of a descriptive/interpretive continuum. At one end of the continuum, Husserl's (2002) forms of descriptive phenomenology have as their aim to 'go back to the things themselves,' (*zu den Sachen selbst)* to describe structures of experience in everyday terms and without resorting to more abstract theorizing. Those working within the hermeneutic tradition, on the other hand, focus more centrally upon the role of interpretation, noting that interpretative activity is an inevitable part of our being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927/1962). But as Langdridge (2008) and Finlay (2009) remind us, there are no hard and fast boundaries between description and interpretation, indeed any such boundaries would be antithetical to the very spirit of phenomenology. For more those of a more descriptive orientation, in order to arrive at the phenomenon/a with a fresh and open perspective, efforts are made to suspend as far as possible the researcher's prior knowledge, presuppositions, attitudes and interpretations of the phenomenon, via a process of **epochē** and **reduction**. 'Epochē' (from the Greek 'to abstain, stop, or keep a distance from') is a term used to denote the bracketing of prior assumptions (including 'scientific' ones) about a phenomenon, or at least our best attempts to do so, in order to be able to reduce it to its essential structures of experience, an essence or 'eidos' of an object of consciousness. These terms should, however, be treated with caution, for as Merleau-Ponty (2001) warns, because the central lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction! Although standing outside of one's socio-cultural frame to achieve complete bracketing of assumptions and beliefs is impossible, nevertheless in practical research terms, I find the concept of epochē useful

in encouraging a more self-critical, reflexive approach. **Intentionality** is the key feature of consciousness within Husserlian phenomenology. Further developed by Merleau-Ponty in relation to the bodily dimension, intentionality centres on the notion that consciousness is always consciousness of something. It is thus intentional, directed or orientated towards something or someone. As Willig (2008, 52) neatly encapsulates: "Intentionality allows objects to appear as phenomena," and explains why different people perceive and experience the 'same' environment in radically different ways. This concept is thus highly applicable to my interests in gendered perceptions of environments.

For me, as for many phenomenologists, any method capable of producing rich, detailed, in-depth, and textured descriptions of participants' actual concrete lived experiences of a phenomenon, has the potential to generate data for the application of phenomenological analysis. To illustrate phenomenology's distinctiveness in portraying sporting experience, Kerry and Armour (2000, 3-4) provide the example of glycogen depletion or 'hitting the wall' in distance running, contrasting this with a physiologist's approach. The latter would most likely focus upon holding constant certain variables whilst manipulating others in order to ascertain whether some distinctive, 'objective' process is occurring in the body. Phenomenologists, however, would endeavor to capture as far as possible the lived meaning of hitting the wall for the participant: how it actually feels to experience this phenomenon, irrespective of whether 'the wall' exists in any physiological, cellular sense. There is a burgeoning literature, particularly within psychology (Moustakas 1994) and sports psychology (Dale 1996) centred on operationalizing phenomenology as a distinctive empirical approach. Within psychology and health-related studies, for example, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is one approach that has been used extensively, although some IPA-based studies do present philosophical problems from the perspective of those adopting a 'stronger'

phenomenological approach in terms of 'openness' to the phenomenon (see Parker 2005 and Allen-Collinson 2009 for critiques). In IPA, semi-structured interviews and forms of thematic content analysis are the primary means used to examine and understand participants' meanings, perceptions of, and beliefs about a phenomenon or phenomena.

Phenomenology (including IPA) has at times been criticized (see for example, Gruppetta, 2004) because many phenomenological researchers, unlike ethnographers, do not themselves participate in the processes under study but rely, instead, upon second-hand accounts. Although this need not necessarily be construed as a weakness of phenomenology per se, or indeed of any methodological approach, autoethnographic phenomenology or autophenomenography provides one means of addressing such criticism, and generating the rich, textured descriptions of first-person experience, including sporting embodiment, that are central to the phenomenological quest to bring to life and share the felt, lived experience. This approach was used in two research projects described below. One project was a collaborative study with a male co-runner and co-researcher (see Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2001, 2008) and one an autophenomenographic study of female running embodiment.

The Research Projects

Congruent with the spirit of feminist phenomenology and the autophenomenographic genre, it is appropriate here to incorporate some personal information regarding my own running biography in order to situate myself as researcher-participant and to contextualize the analysis. A female middle/long-distance runner in my (very!) late forties, I have a running biography stretching over 23 years, which has in the past required sustained commitment to training 6-7 days a week, at times twice daily. Struggling with chronic knee problems since my mid-30s, nowadays I try to restrict myself to running just 5 days per week. Although falling firmly within the non-élite

category, I do remain highly committed, a ‘serious runner’ in Smith’s (1998) categorization.

Some years ago, my male running partner and I both incurred relatively severe knee injuries, and decided systematically to document our injury and rehabilitation processes, each of two years’ duration (for further details of the collaborative autoethnographic study, see Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2001, 2008). We each constructed individual ‘injury logs,' while a third ‘reflective log’ was used to examine the research process per se, to interrogate and synthesize emergent analytic themes and also to exchange at times highly divergent views and experiences. Our logs were read and re-read as part of a lengthy process of data-immersion, employing processes of re-memory (Sanders-Bustle and Oliver 2001) in an attempt to capture and record as vividly as possible our subjective, emotionally-charged, and very corporeal lived experiences. The reflective log helped generate new understandings, and to ‘attune any dissonances’ within what Spiegelberg (1975, 33) terms ‘cooperative phenomenology.' Long-standing careers in running gave us some confidence of fulfilling Garfinkel’s (2002, 175) phenomenologically-derived "unique adequacy requirement:"

> ...for the analyst to recognize, or identify, or follow the development of, or describe phenomena of order in local production of coherent detail, the analyst must be vulgarly competent to the local production and reflexively natural accountability of the phenomenon or order he (sic) is ‘studying’. (italics in original)

In the second study an autophenomenographic approach was used from the outset to examine my experiences as a middle/long-distance runner, training in public spaces. The autophenomenographic method adhered quite closely to Giorgi’s (1985, 1997) and Giorgi and Giorgi’s (2003) guidelines for undertaking phenomenological research in

general, but using myself as both researcher and participant (the ‘auto’ element). I documented in detail my engagement with training for middle/long-distance running via a research log maintained for a period of 2.5 years (and still ongoing). This involves drafting notes of training sessions, not only in terms of timings, terrain, forms of training undertaken, weather conditions (as is familiar practice to many a ‘serious’ runner), but also recording in detail specific, concrete, subjective, and corporeal experiences and feeling states (the ‘phenomena’ element). The length of entries varies between a few sentences and two A-4 pages of notes. Given the temporal pressures of incorporating training sessions into long workdays, however, it is not usually possible for to write more extended field notes.

Adhering to some of Giorgi’s (1985) guidelines, this study includes the following elements: i) the collection of concrete descriptions of phenomena from an 'insider' (my) perspective; ii) the adoption of the phenomenological attitude, my efforts to be open to the richness and complexity of the phenomena; iii) initial impressionistic readings of the descriptions in order to gain a feel for the whole; iv) in-depth re-reading of these descriptions as part of a lengthy process of data-immersion, to identify themes and sub-themes; v) free imaginative variation: I search for the most fundamental meanings of a phenomenon, its ‘essential’ characteristics. This involves imaginatively varying elements of the phenomenon initially identified to ascertain whether it remains identifiable after such imagined changes and so to identify and draw out the ‘essences:' those elements which are, for me, necessary for the phenomenon to be the phenomenon. Given the ideographic nature of the research, exploring my own lifeworld, I depart from Giorgi’s method with regard to constructing general descriptions applicable to a range of participants. Instead, the focus is upon individual experiences of a phenomenon, an in-depth approach which has been used to great effect by other existential phenomenological

researchers (e.g. Finlay 2003) including the researcher's powerful account of her own lived experience of the condition (Toombs 2001).

In order to identify and acknowledge - as far as possible - my own preconceptions and presuppositions about female running in public space, I engaged in two 'bracketing' practices throughout the above study, not only at the research design phase: 1) discussions with insiders and non-insiders to the distance-running subculture, both female and male; and 2) reading ethnographic accounts of a range of other sporting and physical activities in order to compare and contrast the key elements of these with the running experience, including the gendered dimensions. Although I would certainly never claim to have achieved 'full' bracketing (nor indeed consider this possible), these practices greatly helped in increasing critical self-reflection and identifying certain of my assumptions surrounding the experience of being a running woman in public space.

A Running Woman in Public Space: Contradictions and Contraindications

The following discussion addresses some of the key structures of experience emergent from both sets of data, relating in this case to my use of public space for training purposes, often as a solo runner. Public space has been defined by Chua and Edwards (1992) as space where in principle: 1) everyone has rights of access; 2) encounters between individual users are unplanned and unexceptional; 3) people's behavior towards each other is subject to rules of common norms of social civility. But the 'public' is of course not a homogenous body with equal rights of access and participation. Nor is 'space' homogenous, but subject to differentiation, for example, in relation to urban/rural and indoor/outdoor. The social structuring of such space has been subject to extensive analysis. Lefebvre (1977, 341), for example, signals the "political and strategic" nature of public space. Indeed far from being universally open to all, feminist researchers have highlighted the ways in which participation in, and use of public space are structured and

constrained by gender. The gendering of public space, and in particular the contestation of women's 'right' of access, has been explored in a range of studies using a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. Examples include Brooks Gardner's (1980) discussion of men's use of 'street remarks' to underscore women's lack of right to enjoy public space free from harassment; Valentine's (1989) portrayal of the 'geography of women's fear'; and Wesely and Gaarder's (2004) account of women's negotiation of vulnerability in an urban wilderness park.

The social agency of women should not be underestimated. Budgeon (2003) reminds us that it is possible to make new, transformative connections with the body, to live the body in different ways, and to move from experiencing the body as object to living the body in terms of what it can do. Taking a feminist phenomenological stance, de Beauvoir (1972) signalled the empowering force of outdoor recreation for women, whom she exhorted to battle against the elements, take risks, and go out for adventure (see also McDermott 2004). Battling the elements, active social and corporeal agency, resistance, and transformative action certainly constitute core elements in my own lived experience of training for distance running, and are also reflected in accounts of women's physical activity as resistance, which draw upon different theoretical frameworks (e.g. Granskog 2003; Wesely and Gaarder 2004; Cronan and Scott 2008).

In the phenomenological analysis of my data, the paradoxical, contradictory nature of exercising in public space clearly emerged. On the one hand, the negative structures of experience loom large: the dangers of, and bodily vulnerability to harassment (verbal and physical), threat and attack. On the other hand, the positive elements include experiences of empowerment, social agency, resistance, bodily power, strength and sensory pleasure. All these elements emerged from data analysis as essential to my experience of training for distance running, although on any single training outing one

element might be in greater evidence or predominate entirely. In aggregate, the elements comprise my general structure of embodied vulnerability and power, held in a state of flux. I now attempt to unravel some of the intricacies of these lived-body experiences, drawing upon data from both the projects described above.

The Paradox of the Vulnerable/Powerful Woman in the Running Body

Running in public space undoubtedly renders women (and also in some contexts, men) vulnerable to harassment - verbal and on occasions physical, even assault. Indeed, on many occasions men and teenage boys have lunged at me, some grabbing at various parts of my body, including breasts and buttocks; the following field note is unfortunately representative of all too many analogous occurrences of general, low-level (comparatively-speaking) harassment and reveals my embodied response to a sexist street remark:

> Early afternoon, we were running down the high street… J diverted off to nip into the gents' toilet, so I jogged around whilst waiting for him. Suddenly felt someone brush against me and comment, quite loudly: "Fantastic arse, Love!". Before I have chance to utter a withering rejoinder, he is vanishing off down the pavement, turning around to smile and nod, presumably in what he considers an appreciative fashion. I feel the heat and colour rise to my skin, seeing red is indeed the metaphor, angry red suffuses my body at that instant. The adrenalin surge lightens my aching legs and I resume the run at a bursting sprint - at least for the first few minutes. (Log 2, joint study)

Feagin (1991) argues that the relative anonymity of public places emboldens prejudiced individuals to engage in racist behavior inconsistent (one would hope) with prevailing social norms, and this similarly applies to sexist attitudes and behavior exhibited toward women in public. At times, as indicated above, such flagrant sexism engenders deeply

embodied feelings of outrage and anger, but in other contexts, the vulnerability of my woman's body in public space is brought home to me as I run warily, eyes and ears on full alert, through narrow alleys, dark streets or even just past pub entrances where lascivious comments erupt from boozy male mouths. But running outdoors also makes me feel strong, powerful, honed, dynamic, capable. Granskog (2003) found that triathlon provided a social space where women could attain a greater sense of personal empowerment in a society usually discounting of female capacities and strengths. Analogously, I love the feeling of lived-body empowerment, strength, 'butchness' (c.f. Crawley 2002), of putting my body to the test, stretching its muscles, sinews and capabilities (increasingly so as age takes its toll!), especially after a hard day of university work. The mind/body linkage so fundamental to phenomenology is brought to the fore, as I struggle to gain some bodily balance between long hours of 'mind work', cramped up in a predominantly sedentary job and the all-too-brief escape, the 'rush' and challenge of physical activity after the working day:

> Nearly 3 weeks solid of marking. Legs and arms heavy from it, neck and shoulders rigid, strained, taut to breaking. Eyes red and gritty. It's going to be a hard run tonight, I guess. But, just a few minutes into my stride and the navy-dusk wind is cutting away the work smog, sloughing off the grey skin of the working day. I am being cleansed. I am back. I am back in-body after yet another day of attempted body denial, and enforced focus on the headwork. Quads surge forwards, muscles strong and bulking, pushing against tracksters, abs tighten and flatten against the chill wind as I begin to up the pace… Power surges through me, I feel butch, lean, mean and honed, and very much woman. (Autophenomenography, February 2008)

The Elemental Body-World

Exercising outdoors—whether rural or urban—as opposed to indoors, does engender lived-body vulnerabilities. At times rural isolation seems to hold more danger: distance from people, safety and sources of help, challenging terrain, encounters with animals. But then the urban harbours a set of specific dangers, especially at night: dark alleys and underpasses, doorways where men can lurk and lunge out, drunks, stalkers, gangs of men and youths. But being outdoors is an intrinsic part of running for me (indoor treadmill running is a dire last resort): facing all the elements in the fresh air, battling against vicious wind, stinging hail and pelting rain, sinking in fresh snow, glistening in high summer sun, melting into dark night, coursing over fields eerie in silvery moonlight, running alongside the heavy beat of flying swans. Following de Beauvoir's (1972) exhortation to women to battle the elements, and commensurate with Merleau-Ponty's (2001) portrayal of the intertwining of body and world, my body as part of the elemental world is a fundamental component of my running experience:

> As I set off in the last rays of April sunshine, down the hill towards the playing fields and river, dark, lowering cloud obscures the hills on the other side of the valley. It looks as though it's going to pour down or snow heavily. Sure enough the temperature is dropping rapidly and an icy wind's edge chills my skin, which chafes against thin cotton tee shirt. Shall I head home for warmer gear now, is there time??... No, but best divert away from the open fields and head towards the scant cover of early spring trees. As I continue, the thin wind is bitter against my slight body, but as my core begins to warm to the labour, a strange sensation comes over me. Like Baked Alaska in reverse: my wind-chilled outer skin is bitterly cold, grey-blue, but it seems as though just a few layers beneath the epidermis, my inner body is glow-warm orange. The strangeness of the feeling

> preoccupies me so that the discomfort of the cold is forgotten for a while and I can concentrate on a steady even pace. (Autophenomenography, April 2008)

Running Abreast

Contradictions and paradoxes also emerge in relation to which running gear to select - for running-purpose but also for self-presentation in public space: snug-fitting, skin tight, streamlined clothing provides greater functionality for my running body, being neat and aerodynamic, but also attracts unwanted male attention and comments. My clothing compromise is usually to opt for the streamlined, functional kit but to seek anonymity and protection via dark sunglasses and a cap pulled down low; MP3 player and headphones provide a supplementary auditory barrier against lewd street remarks and looks, and can be switched off once I reach the different lived space of the fields and meadows that fringe the city or when running through darkened streets, which require aural attentiveness to potential danger. Looser, baggy clothing is too cumbersome and restrictive, flapping in the breeze, catching against and chafing the body, whilst 'proper' running kit renders me empowered, dynamic, streamlined. Relatedly, it has taken years and years to hone down and 'discipline' the fleshy expansiveness of breasts to create a more 'sleek' running form. From a phenomenological perspective, Young (1992) evocatively portrays how a woman's breasts can form the centre of her being-in-the-world, more like fluid than a solid, and in movement being liable to sway, jiggle, bounce, and ripple, even when the movement is small. For many women runners, even those who are not particularly full-breasted, such swaying and bouncing can be intensely uncomfortable, even painful when exacerbated by the action of running. Even now, after decades of (non-surgical) breast reduction via exercise, I have to wear two sports bras in order to avoid being the target of unwanted attention, but also to avoid the embodied discomfort, the 'dys-appearance' of my breasted body (c.f. Gimlin 2006):

> Oh no, I find I've forgotten to pack the usual two bras in my training bag. Ach well, I'll just have to try running in the 'day' bra. But minutes in to the training run and it's nigh on impossible! Not only is it incredibly uncomfortable, verging on painful, but my whole body feels huge, ungainly, uncoordinated, and very unbalanced. Surprisingly, it's not just my upper body but strangely my quads also feel big and billowy, uncoordinated. The two sports bras combination that I normally wear may be unflattering' to 'feminine curves' but their flattening and constricting presence makes me feel 'contained', streamlined and aerodynamic. How bizarre that their lack makes me feel as though I'm not a real runner at all. The house is only 10 minutes into the run, so I decide to make a quick pit stop and effect a speedy change. (Autophenomenography, February 2008)

Sensory Pleasures and Dangers

The centrality of the sensory dimension of sporting embodiment has been signalled in recent years (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007; Sparkes 2009), but only rarely features as the focal point within sports studies. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) for example emphasize the importance of 'listening for hazards' when undertaking running training in public, where roads, parks, and pathways are replete with hazards—some more deliberate than others—generated by traffic, pavement cyclists, pedestrians, and dogs. For me, this awareness of danger can manifest itself not only via the visual and aural, but also at a deeply visceral level, and in quickened, sometimes ragged breathing, elevated pulse rate, a tightening of my abdomen and a hypersensitivity of skin, especially on arms and thighs:

> Decided to take the bracken route down the moor to the track, but as I enter the head-height, dense bracken, I feel hemmed in, trapped – I can't see what's around the corner, who might be lurking at the path sides. My breath catches, holds, ears straining for any sound, goose pimples catch the moor breeze, trying to quieten

> my heart beat so that I can hear… probably just sheep… I have to walk some of the way, the path is too steep, too friable for running, but I'm light and primed for flight as any moorland creature… Hit the open space with relief. (Autophenomenography, July 2008)

In contrast, the sensuous pleasures of running form a key structure of my running experience. The olfactory dimension, whilst largely neglected in studies of sport generally (Sparkes 2009), features strongly in more sensorily-focussed sporting analyses where smells can confirm the self's involvement in the sporting present moment, and also substantiate sporting identity via memory (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007). The smell of fresh-cut grass, for example, evokes in me strong childhood memories of watching cricket or listening to the radio commentary in my old family back garden:

> As I head down suburban streets to the river meadows, the warmed sweet scent of cut grass suddenly meets me, taking me back to those long, summer-haze holiday afternoons as a child, with all the family sitting out in the back garden in deckchairs, cricket on the radio, a tractor busy somewhere in a distant field and the drone of a light aircraft overhead. My memory mind travels, and a long section of the pathway goes missing in my running mind. (Autophenomenography, May 2008)

Other sensory pleasures of the running body in harmony with landscape and (MP3 player-generated in this case) soundscape also emerge as salient structures of experience:

> One of those 'in the moment' runs tonight. Glorious sunset down by the river, great rhythm, my strides just eat up the ground. Whole sections of the route have gone missing (recalls an earlier fieldnote from a different place, a different time) as John Bonham's2 great tree trunk sticks beat out the rhythm. Machine-gun the pace. Perfect rhythm, perfect timing. Flow. Breathing and beat in synchronicity.

> As aquamarine finale of sunset darkens to indigo, as the dying Pagey2 riffs fade away, I walk the last few steps down the path to my front door. Fade out. Synchronicity. (Autophenomenography, January 2008)

These then are illustrative of some of the key structures of my lived experience as a running-woman who habitually undertakes her training in the contested and gendered zone of 'public' outdoor space.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to contribute, in a small way, to the feminist phenomenological research literature, by examining the nexus of structure and agency in sporting embodiment as played out in my particular life-world, that of a female distance runner. This is an under-researched area within the feminist phenomenological tradition, but one which provides, I would argue, an excellent domain for the application of its theoretical insights. For me, the constraints of social structure and the potentials of female agency coalesce powerfully in my lived experiences of outdoor running. Their relationship is lived out at a deep, individual embodied level in terms of the endlessly negotiated, fluctuating ways of balancing both corporeal and psychological power and vulnerability. Feminist phenomenology offers one way of 'capturing' these tensions and paradoxes, partial though that capture must always inevitably be within the phenomenological spirit. An analysis of the linkages between our subjective, lived-body experiences and our situatedness within social structures, offers a powerful means of investigating female subjectivity and embodiment. In particular, it would seem there is a strong rationale for incorporating feminist-phenomenological perspectives into the pantheon of theoretical and methodological approaches to investigating women's sporting embodiment. These can generate fresh research insights, grounded in the carnal,

'fleshy,' lived, richly-textured realities of the moving, sweating, sensuous female sporting body, which of course also holds cultural meanings, significances, purposes and interests.

This is by no means to advocate feminist phenomenology as the only or even necessarily the best way of undertaking qualitative investigation into female sporting embodiment, but to propose it as a potent complementary approach, to widen and deepen the focus of the feminist lens. Linked to the power of feminist theorizations, including those of 'difference,' phenomenology encourages a re/consideration of the structures of women's sporting and physical activity experiences, always taking into account the full force of social-structural (including ideological) location and constraint. It can help promote deep reflection upon, and empathic understanding of how it actually feels to be the woman in the sporting body.

Notes

1. Gruppetta (2004) contends that if a researcher studies her/his own experiences of a phenomenon/phenomena rather than a 'cultural place,' then the appropriate term would be 'autophenomenography.'
2. John Bonham was the legendary drummer with Led Zeppelin until his untimely death; Jimmy Page their virtuoso lead guitarist.

References

Ahmed, S. 2007. Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Alcoff, L. M. 2000. Phenomenology, post-structuralism, and feminist theory on the concept of experience. In Feminist phenomenology, eds L. Fisher and L. Embree, 39-56. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Allen-Collinson, J. 2009. Sporting embodiment: sports studies and the (continuing) promise of phenomenology. Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, 1 (3): 279-296.

Allen-Collinson, J and J. Hockey, 2001. Runners' tales: autoethnography, injury and narrative. Auto/Biography IX (1 & 2): 95-106.

Allen-Collinson, J. and J. Hockey, 2008. Autoethnography as 'valid' methodology? a study of disrupted identity narratives. The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences 3 (6): 209-217.

Aoki, D. 1996. Sex and muscle: the female bodybuilder meets Lacan. Body & Society 2 (4): 59-74.

Bartky, S. 1990. Femininity and domination: studies in the phenomenology of oppression. New York: Routledge.

Brooks Gardner, C. 1980. Passing by: street remarks, address rights, and the urban female. Sociological Inquiry 50: 328-356.

Budgeon, S. 2003. Identity as an embodied event. Body & Society 9 (1): 37–57.

Burke, S.M., A.C. Sparkes and J. Allen-Collinson. 2008. High altitude climbers as ethnomethodologists making sense of cognitive dissonance: Ethnographic insights from an attempt to scale Mt Everest. The Sport Psychologist 22 (3): 336-355.

Butler, J. 2006. Sexual difference as a question of ethics: alterities of the flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty. In: Feminist interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, eds D. Olkowski and G. Weiss, 107-125. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Chua, B.H. and N. Edwards. 1992. Public space: design, use and management. In Public space: design use and management, eds B. H. Chua and N. Edwards, 1-10. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Coates, S. 1999. Analysing the physical: An ethnomethodological study of boxing, Ethnographic Studies 4: 14-26

Coy, M. 2009. This body which is not mine: the notion of the habit body, prostitution and (dis)embodiment. Feminist Theory 10 (1): 61-75.

Crawley, S. 2002. 'They still don't understand why I hate wearing dresses!' An autoethnographic rant on dresses, boats and butchness. Cultural Studies and Critical Methodologies 2 (1): 69-92.

Cronan, M. K. and D. Scott. 2008. Triathlon and women's narratives of bodies and sport. Leisure Sciences 30: 17-34.

Csordas, T. 1994. The sacred self: a cultural phenomenology of charismatic healing. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Csordas, T. 2002. Body/meaning/healing. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dale, G.A. 1996. Existential phenomenology: emphasizing the experience of the athlete in sport psychology research. The Sport Psychologist 10: 307-321.

de Beauvoir, S. 1972. The second sex (trans. H. Parshley). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Ehrich, L.C. 1999. Untangling the threads and coils of the web of phenomenology. Education Research and Perspectives 26 (2): 19-44.

Embree, L. and Mohanty, J.N. 1997. Introduction. In Encyclopedia of phenomenology, eds L. Embree et al., pp. 1-10. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Feagin, J. R. 1991. The continuing significance of race: Anti-Black discrimination in public places. American Sociological Review 56: 101-116.

Finlay, L. 2003. The intertwining of body, self and world: a phenomenological study of living with recently diagnosed multiple sclerosis. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology 34 (6): 157-178.

Finlay, L. 2009. Debating phenomenological research methods. Phenomenology & Practice 3 (1): 6-25.

Fisher, L. 2000. Phenomenology and feminism: perspectives on their relation. In Feminist Phenomenology, eds L. Fisher and L. Embree, 17-37. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Garfinkel, H. 2002. Ethnomethodology's program: Working out Durkheim's aphorism, ed. A. Warfield Rawls: New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

George, M. 2005. Making sense of muscle: the body experiences of collegiate women athletes. Sociological Inquiry 75 (3): 317-345.

Gimlin, D. 2006. The absent body project: cosmetic surgery as a response to bodily dys-appearance. Sociology 40 (4): 699-716.

Giorgi, A.P., ed. 1985. Phenomenology and psychological research. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A.P. 1997. The theory, practice and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology 28 (2): 235-260.

Giorgi, A.P and B.M. Giorgi. 2003. The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In Qualitative research in psychology, eds P. Camic, J.E. Rhodes and L.Yardley, 242-273. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Granskog, J. 2003. Just 'Tri' and 'Du' it: the variable impact of female involvement in the triathlon/duathlon sport culture. In Athletic intruders. Ethnographic research on

women, culture, and exercise, eds A. Bolin and J. Granskog, 27-52. New York: State University of New York Press.

Grosz, E. 1995. Space time and perversion: the politics of bodies. New York, Routledge.

Gruppetta, M. 2004. Autophenomenography? Alternative uses of autobiographically based research. In Association for Active Researchers in Education (AARE) Conference Paper Abstracts – 2004, ed. P. L. Jeffery. Sydney: AARE, http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/gru04228.pdf (accessed June, 9 2009).

Hall, M. A. 1996. Feminism and sporting bodies: essays on theory and practice. Champaign, Il: Human Kinetics.

Hanmer, J. and S. Saunders. 1984. Well-founded fear: a community study of violence to women. London: Hutchinson.

Hargreaves, J. 2007. Sport, exercise, and the female muslim body: negotiating Islam, politics, and male power. In Physical culture, power, and the body, eds J. Hargreaves and P. A. Vertinsky, 74-100 . London: Routledge.

Heidegger, M. 1927/1962. Being and time. Translated from the German by permission of Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hemphill, D. 2005. Deeper inside the beautiful game. Journal of the Philosophy of Sport XXXII: 105-115.

Hockey, J. and J. Allen-Collinson. 2007. Grasping the phenomenology of sporting bodies. International Review for the Sociology of Sport 42 (2): 115-131.

Husserl, E. (2002) Ideas: general introduction to pure phenomenology. London: Routledge.

Kerry, D.S. and K.M. Armour. 2000. Sport sciences and the promise of phenomenology: philosophy, method, and insight. Quest 52 (1): 1-17.

Kruks, S. 2006. Merleau-Ponty and the problem of difference in feminism. In Feminist interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, eds D. Olkowski and G. Weiss, G. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Langdridge. D. 2008. Phenomenology and critical social psychology: directions and debates in theory and research. Social and Personality Psychology Compass 2: 1126-1142.

Lefebvre, H. 1977. Reflections on the politics of space. In Radical geography, ed. R Peet, 39-352. London: Methuen.

Lowe, M. R. 1998. Women of steel: female body builders and the struggle for self-definition. New York: New York University Press.

Markula, P. 2003. The technologies of the self: feminism, Foucault and sport. Sociology of Sport Journal 20: 87-107.

Masciotra, D., E. Ackermann and W.-M. Roth. 2001. 'Maai': the art of distancing in Karate-Do: mutual attunement in close encounters. Journal of Adult Development 8 (2): 119-132.

McDermott, L. 2004. Exploring intersections of physicality and female-only canoeing experiences. Leisure Studies 23 (3): 283-301.

McDonald, I. 2007. Bodily practice, performance art, competitive sport: a critique of Kalarippayattu, martial art of Kerala. Contributions to Indian Sociology 41 (2): 143–168.

McKay, J. 1994. Embodying the 'new' sporting woman. Hecate 20 (1): 68-83.

Mensch, J. 2006. Artificial intelligence and the phenomenology of flesh. PhaenEx 1 (1): 73-85

Merleau-Ponty, M. 2001. Phenomenology of perception, trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Morley, J. 2001. Inspiration and expiration: Yoga practice through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. Philosophy East and West 51 (1): 73-82.

Moustakas, C. 1994. Phenomenological research methods. London: Sage.

Olkowski, D. 2006. Only nature is mother to the child. In Feminist interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, eds D. Olkowski and G. Weiss, 49-70. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Olkowski, D. and G. Weiss, eds. 2006. Feminist interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Pace, L. K. 2009. Ontological explorations: a narrative approach. Qualitative Inquiry 15 (2): 409-420.

Parker, I. 2005. Qualitative psychology: introducing radical research. Maidenhead: OU Press.

Rail, G. 1992. Physical contact and women's basketball: a phenomenological construction and contextualisation. International Review for the Sociology of Sport 27 (1): 1-25.

Samudra, J. K. 2008. Memory in our body: thick participation and the translation of kinaesthetic experience. American Ethnologist 35 (4): 665-681.

Sanders-Bustle, L. and K.L. Oliver. 2001. The role of physical activity in the lives of researchers: a body-narrative. Studies in Philosophy and Education 20: 507-520.

Smith, S. L. 1998. Athletes, runners and joggers: participant-group dynamics in a sport of 'individuals'. Sociology of Sport Journal 15: 174-192.

Sparkes, A. 2009. Ethnography and the senses: challenges and possibilities. Qualitative Research in Sport & Exercise 1 (1): 21-35.

Spiegelberg, H. 1975. Doing phenomenology. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Toombs, S.K. 2001. Reflections on bodily change: the lived experience of disability. In Phenomenology and medicine, ed. S. K. Toombs, 247–61. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Valentine, G. 1989. The geography of women's fear. Area 21: 385-390.

Wainwright, S.P. and B.S. Turner. 2003. Aging and the dancing body. In Aging bodies: images and everyday experience, ed. C.A. Faircloth, 259-292. Oxford: Altamira Press. Weiss, G. 1999. Body images: embodiment as intercorporeality. London: Routledge.

Wesely, J. K. and E. Gaarder. 2004. The gendered 'nature' of the urban outdoors: women negotiating fear of violence. Gender & Society 18 (5): 645-663.

Willig, C. 2008. Introducing qualitative research in psychology (2nd ed.). Milton Keynes: Open University Press/McGraw Hill.

Woodward, K. 2008. Hanging out and hanging about: insider/outsider research in the sport of boxing. Ethnography 9 (4): 536-561.

Young, I.M. 1980. Throwing like a girl: a phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility and spatiality. Human Studies 3: 137-156.

Young, I.M. 1992. Breasted experience: the look and the feeling. In The body in medical thought and practice, ed. D. Leder, 215-230. Boston: Kluwer Academic.

Young, I.M. 1998. 'Throwing like a girl': twenty years later. In Body and flesh: a philosophical reader, ed. D. Welton, 286-290. Oxford: Blackwell.