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'Ploughing on': A sociological investigation of 'endurance work' in competitive swimming and distance-running

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Despite a burgeoning corpus of qualitative studies of sport and physical cultures, in-depth and embodied investigations of those requiring sustained engagement with ‘endurance work’ remain relatively under-developed. These physical cultures are sociologically interesting as they often demand of practitioners intense commitment in terms of time, energy, and (for many) finances devoted to endurance-training regimes. They also require substantial sacrifice with regard to social activities and family life, even for those not competing at elite levels. The nature of endurance and enduring still remains under-researched from a sociological and qualitative perspective, however, and we directly address this gap in the research literature by contributing fresh theoretical insights and empirical data on the lived experience of endurance in two different lifeworlds: competitive swimming and distance running. Employing a sociological-phenomenological framework, we analyse and conceptualise data derived from two separate ethnographic and autoethnographic research projects, and explore interesting commonalities in the shared lived experience of endurance and ‘endurance work’ in these two distinctive physical cultures.

Keywords: sociological phenomenology; performance swimming; distance running; endurance work; embodiment;

Introduction

Despite a burgeoning corpus of qualitative studies of sport and physical cultures, in-depth and embodied investigations of those falling under the general rubric of ‘endurance’ sports remain relatively under-developed. These domains are sociologically interesting as they often demand of practitioners high levels of commitment in terms of time, energy, financial resources (for some activities), and require substantial sacrifice or ‘opportunity costs’ with regard to social activities and family life (see Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2001) even for those not competing at elite levels. The nature of endurance and enduring still remains under-researched from a sociological and qualitative perspective (see Allen-Collinson et al., 2018; Atkinson, 2008; Bridel, Markula, and Denison 2016; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2016; Reischer, 2001). In this article, we directly address the gap in the extant literature by contributing theoretical insights and empirical data on the lived experience of endurance in two distinctive lifeworlds; those of competitive swimming and distance running. More specifically, we focus upon training for these physical-cultural activities, and the endurance, and ‘endurance work’, this entails. The article responds to calls to sociologists (for example, by Shilling, 2017) when theorising the body as a socio-natural phenomenon, to examine processes of embodied learning, and the acquisition of culturally-structured practices (see also Allen-Collinson 2018). Specifically, Shilling (2017) identifies the lack of sociological investigation into the cognitive, corporeal and cultural nexus. Endurance, and specifically ‘endurance work’ (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018) illustrate well the cognitive-corporeal nexus at work. ‘Endurance work’ is conceptualised here as the active, agentic, social and often reflexive form of ‘work’ that is involved in the social production of endurance (explored further below), which requires mindful sense-making, and communication to others via social interaction (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018).

There is currently a small sociological literature on specific endurance *sports*, which includes studies of triathlon (Atkinson 2008, Jones and Aitchison 2007, McCarville 2007), cycling (Austin 2010), distance running (Bridel et al. 2016, Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2016), ultra-running (Hanold 2010) mountaineering (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018), ultra-endurance events (Rochat, Gesber, Seifert, and Hauw 2018), combat sports (Spencer 2012) and swimming (Throsby 2013, 2016) to give some examples germane to our current purpose. The article contributes fresh theoretical thinking and original data by employing a sociological-phenomenological perspective, and drawing on data derived from two separate ethnographic and autoethnographic research projects, described below. Our focus here is on the development of endurance, and engagement in endurance work, specifically during *training* for the two sports chosen: competitive swimming, and distance running. Sociological phenomenology provides a particularly powerful theoretical framework in the investigation of sporting and physical-cultural activities at the ‘lived’ level, including the sensory dimension, and in seeking to identify the very ‘essences’ of human lived experience in these domains. In this, it differs from existing studies that draw on other theoretical traditions, for example, those that highlight discursive constructions of the sporting body. Its strengths lie in its focus upon embodiment and deeply corporeal experience - as lived within and through socio-cultural frameworks. We first provide a brief consideration of our sociological conceptualisation of endurance, before portraying the theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Endurance and sporting embodiment

Defined as the ability to keep going in the face of corporeal and cognitive pain, discomfort, and suffering (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018), endurance as the ability and willingness to endure considerable hardship have long been celebrated and highly valorised practices in endurance-based sports and physical cultures. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising to find a plethora of

research dedicated to developing physiological endurance in order to achieve higher levels of performance. In competitive swimming, for example, several internationally renowned coaches have produced guides to the development of endurance through the systematic manipulation of training into cycles, and the use of a variety of training stimuli known as periodisation (see Hannula and Thornton 2001, 2012; Maglischo 2003; Sweetenham and Atkinson 2003). From a sociological and anthropological perspective, however, endurance remains under-researched (Bridel et al. 2016). Recent sociological and social-psychological work (e.g. Allen-Collinson et al. 2018; Ronkainen, Ryba and Nesti, 2013) challenges conceptualisations of endurance, both corporeal and cognitive, as being innate, an inherent characteristic or personality trait, and focuses upon the learning and development of endurance within socio-cultural frameworks. As Hockey and Allen-Collinson's (2016) account of 'doing endurance' in the physical culture of distance running portrays, the running-body and running-mind inter-relate and influence each other in the production of endurance. 'Doing endurance' is a central component of participation in the distance-running lifeworld, constituting part of the general being-in-the-world of committed runners, whether elite or non-elite.

Examining a different physical-cultural context, Allen-Collinson and colleagues (2018) have explored the ways in which mountaineers engage agentially and purposively with endurance work, and the active somatic learning of endurance. These authors investigated how learning endurance and developing the ability to endure are never complete or fully achieved once and for all, as we also discuss in our findings below. A gamut of corporeal and cognitive challenges can arise even in the most hardened and experienced practitioner, and, therefore, endurance is 'provisional and contingent, requiring ongoing assessment of fitness levels and experiential knowledge' (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018: 14). Endurance therefore has to be learnt, developed, refined and often relearnt, over time via

substantial effort and training. Endurance, like other acquired ‘body techniques’ (Mauss 1979), ‘reflexive body techniques’ (Crossley 2004), or ‘habits’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002), is not permanent, and is susceptible to decay. This can happen, for example, when an athlete has to take time out of training due to illness, injury, and eventually athletic retirement. Endurance, and the meanings of endurance are actively constructed by practitioners, ‘produced’ and communicated in social interaction (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018), and often transmitted to others via a form of body pedagogics (Shilling 2017). Additionally, it is important to examine how fundamentally inter-related and intertwining cognitive and corporeal forms of endurance are, for mind and body must work together in order to undertake endurance work.

In this article, we contribute fresh perspectives to an embryonic sociology of endurance, both theoretically and empirically, by focusing on how endurance is developed, understood and communicated in two distinctive physical cultures: competitive swimming and distance running, which share a common focus on, and valorisation of, endurance. To do so, we draw on the framework of sociological phenomenology, to facilitate the ‘unveiling’, exploration and questioning of the core structures of endurance as lived experience. Before detailing this particular theoretical approach, we note that one of the key reasons for adopting this form of phenomenology is its affordance of the opportunity to analyse ‘endurance work’ as a skilled and often tacit understanding and practice developed through experience, and through active, agentic relations with socio-cultural as well as physical surroundings. Such a position can thus challenge and extend some of the long-held understandings of endurance as purely physiologically-grounded. Here, we highlight endurance work as lived, shared intersubjectively, and strongly shaped by its physical-cultural context.

Sociological Phenomenology

The origins of modern phenomenology can be found in the early twentieth-century work of the German philosopher Husserl (1983). In his quest to understand how humans encounter phenomena – things as they appear to the conscious mind - Husserl highlighted how human consciousness is always conscious of something, terming this *intentionality*, to signify how humans experience an intentional relationship with the world. One of Husserl's (1983) key exhortations in investigating human experience was to adopt an open, inquiring approach that challenges the taken-for-granted attitude of everyday life (termed the 'natural attitude').

Adopting the phenomenological attitude was for him necessary in the quest to 'return to the things themselves' and arrive at a description of the core element(s) or 'essences' of a phenomenon, shorn of the presuppositions and assumptions that normally envelope them in the natural attitude. To this end, he proposed a number of steps, including engagement with the phenomenological *epochē*, temporarily to bracket, suspend or 'put out of play' (Husserl 1983: 61) scientific, philosophical, cultural and everyday assumptions about a phenomenon, particularly those enveloped in the natural attitude (Moran, 2000: 11) of everyday life and immediate experience. Of further note, and of direct relevance to the current article, is phenomenology's subsequent development and linkage with other philosophical traditions such as existentialism, in the case of French existentialist writers such as de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty (2002), for example, moved away from some of the ideational concerns evident in Husserl's early thinking, to focus upon the role of the body (and body-mind) in our everyday experiencing of the world, viewing the lived-body (*Leib*) as a fundamental constituent of an embodied, perceptual capacity. Embodiment forms a central component of Merleau-Ponty's (2002) existential phenomenology; a perspective that understands the world, the body and human consciousness as fundamentally intertwined, inter-related and mutually influencing (Allen-Collinson 2009). Whilst there is not the scope

here to delve into the rich diversity of the various phenomenological traditions, in-depth considerations, including in relation to the investigation of sporting contexts can be found in the literature (e.g. Kerry and Armour 2000, Allen-Collinson 2009).

Moving on to the nexus of sociology and phenomenology more specifically, in his ground-breaking work, Schütz (1967) innovatively applied phenomenology within North American sociology. The interconnection between phenomenology and sociology is particularly striking in Schütz's adoption and development of the phenomenological notion of the lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*: the everyday world of subjective, immediate and direct experience, intersubjectively shared with others. Furthermore, Schütz (1967) emphasized the need to address how social actors' lifeworlds are embedded within social structure and cultural milieux (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2016). A 'sociologised' variant of phenomenology therefore departs from traditional philosophical phenomenology in that it encourages researchers to acknowledge the structurally, politically and ideologically-influenced, historically-specific, and socially situated nature of human embodiment and experience (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2011: 332) as well as applying phenomenologically-inspired principles to the collection and analysis of empirical data. In so doing, an applied phenomenology helps pave the way to bridging sociology and phenomenology, allowing not only the sociological investigation of social phenomena such as love, power, or humour, but also the phenomenological descriptions of the consciousness activities and preconditions involved in such phenomena, according to Dreher and Santos (2017).

Having set out briefly the theoretical perspective underpinning the two research projects upon which we draw, we now portray the methodological framework and methods we adopted in both studies.

The research projects

Phenomenology is both philosophy and methodology; a perspective that embraces a whole way of thinking, an encompassing *Weltanschauung* or worldview/way of viewing (Allen-Collinson 2016). A number of social-science researchers have sought to operationalise phenomenology in order to apply some of its principles to empirical data. Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenological method, for example, has been widely adopted in psychological phenomenological research (Creswell and Poth 2018), and also in some sociological phenomenological research (e.g. McNarry et al. 2020a). In both of the studies described here, we draw influence from Giorgi's (1997) empirical phenomenological approach in that data collection and analysis involved: 1) the collection of concrete descriptions of phenomena from participants; 2) the adoption of a questioning phenomenological attitude; 3) initial impressionistic readings of the descriptions in order to gain a feel for the whole data-set; 4) in-depth re-reading of the descriptions as part of our data immersion to identify themes, and; 5) the production of general statements or themes of the essential patterns or structure(s) of the experiences.

Throughout both the competitive swimming (hereafter Study 1) and distance running projects (Study 2), the first and second authors engaged with the phenomenological *epochē* via a variety of processes and techniques, including bracketing discussions with other members of the research team in Study 1, and with fellow runners and non-runners in Study 2. Self-elicited reflections were also undertaken, including a joint research log in Study 2, and the reading of ethnographic accounts from other sporting and physical cultures for both studies, in order to compare and contrast participant experiences of these. In doing so, we strove to 'unveil' some of our tacit knowledge and assumptions about the lifeworlds of competitive swimming and distance running, respectively. It was particularly important to

engage in sustained efforts and bracketing and reflexivity, given our familiarity with the sporting cultures under study (see also Allen-Collinson 2011; McNarry et al. 2019). Data collection for the two studies took place as follows.

Study 1: competitive swimmers

Once ethical approval was secured for the ethnographic study, data were collected from a group of competitive swimmers based at an indoor pool at a university in England. Data collection was via overt participant observation (approximately 300 hours) and semi-structured interviews with the performance swimmers (12 male / 7 female; 17 White British / 2 White Irish swimmers) during three separate field ‘immersions’ spanning a full swimming season. During this time, the first author adopted the role of a volunteer assistant, allowing him privileged access to this particular lifeworld and its inhabitants. Fieldnotes were recorded on the OneNote iPhone application during each training session and subsequently written up as soon as possible afterwards, in order to prevent details fading from memory. Interviews were conducted in line with Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009: 27) semi-structured lifeworld interview approach, which is phenomenologically sympathetic as it ‘attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subject’s own perspective’.

Swimmers at the field site (for whom pseudonyms are used throughout) were sampled for interview according to criteria that included being a member of a performance squad and having competed at a minimum of British Championship-level in the previous 12 months. These inclusion criteria covered all members of the existing performance squads, so opportunistic sampling was then used in order to select a variety of athletes covering different strokes and events. In total, 19 individual interviews (average length 75 minutes), spanning a range of experience from British Championship level through to athletes who had competed internationally at the World Championships and the Commonwealth Games, were conducted

during field immersion one. These were recorded on a Dictaphone, and transcribed verbatim between immersion one and two. A follow-up interview (average length 32 minutes) was then held with each participant during immersion two, in order to seek clarification or further information on points raised during the first interview. A final set of group interviews was then conducted during immersion three (average length 67 minutes). These group interviews acted as a form of ‘member reflection’ (Tracy 2010) allowing for further questions, critique, feedback and collaboration as part of the data collection process. We emphasize again that it is engagement in endurance work during swimming training on which we focus here, rather than on participation in what would be termed ‘endurance swimming’ events.

Study 2: distance runners

The second study was a duo-autoethnographic (Allen-Collinson 2013) and joint auto-phenomenographic investigation into amateur but ‘serious’ distance running, undertaken by Author 2 and a long-standing co-runner and co-researcher (who has given permission for data to be used), as two highly experienced veteran runners. At the time of data collection, both runners had been involved in the UK running scene for many decades, sustaining individual and then collective commitment to training six/seven days a week (during various periods), with racing experience ranging from five miles to marathons, and over a variety of different terrains from flat road racing, through cross-country racing, to fell (mountain) running. For both runners, their running practices at the time of the research project cohered with two of Bale’s (2004) forms: 1) welfare running, pursued for health and fitness aims; and also 2) performance running, pursued in order to improve and sustain performance, although it should be noted that this was not ‘performance’ in terms of elite performance. This kind of running-training is commensurate with Bale’s (2004) conceptualisation of running as *work* rather than an activity engaged in for fun or leisure. Whilst not paid work, it nevertheless

demands regular and frequent, highly disciplined, routinised practice. This form of running also reverberates with Howe and Morris' (2009) portrayal of a running 'taskscape' (Ingold 1997) requiring disciplined and routinised activity, undertaken (at least partly) in a somewhat instrumental and functional mode as a means of producing and maintaining a running-body.

Although Study 2 was primarily a duo-autoethnographic project, it did also incorporate autophenomenographic elements, one of which was found to be the phenomenon of endurance. Autophenomenography, for those unfamiliar with this approach, is a methodology that shares some similarities with autoethnography, but involves the researcher or researchers focusing on their lived, embodied experience of a phenomenon or phenomena, rather than on the *ethnós* or cultural/physical-cultural group (see also Allen-Collinson 2011). There is, perhaps inevitably, some intertwining and overlap between the autoethnographic and autophenomenographic genres in sociology and anthropology, given that embodiment is socio-culturally experienced and emplaced (Allen-Collinson 2009). The auto-phenomenographic researcher thus subjects her/his own lived experience to sustained and rigorous forms of phenomenological analysis, as described above. The collaborative project was instigated by the near simultaneous experience of long-term running injuries, and a subsequent decision systematically to document both researchers' engagement with the injury and rehabilitation process over a two-year period. Data collection was undertaken individually and jointly as both researchers maintained individual training and injury logs (Logs 1&2), alongside a jointly written reflective log that was constructed in order to document and analyse the research process itself and engagement with the study. Within this joint log (Log 3), which also drew on the individual accounts, we sought to challenge and question taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the kind of running undertaken, commensurate with a phenomenologically-sensitive approach. As researchers, we also questioned, reflected upon and eventually synthesized the data themes we identified.

The data from both Study 1 and Study 2 were analysed in accordance with the principles noted earlier vis-à-vis Giorgi's (1997) guidelines. From these data sets, the themes of endurance and endurance work were identified as core structures of the lived experience of both competitive swimming and distance running. From a gamut of sub-themes, and following extended discussions between all three authors, we decided to focus here on the following elements of endurance, as particularly vividly reflected in the findings from both studies: 1) (re)learning mind-body endurance; 2) intersubjectivity and endurance.

(Re)Learning mind-body endurance

Training for competitive swimming and distance running embraces a demanding combination of aerobic and anaerobic work, both of which 'stress' the body in different ways. The resultant sensations of fatigue, discomfort and pain constitute a normalized and routinized experience for swimmers and distance runners (see Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2016; McNarry et al. 2020b), to which they learn to adjust and to 'stay with'. The runners noted:

During our discussions, we have given the concept of 'head down, keep going' when running quite a lot of attention in our individual logs... it is a process of adjusting to the feeling of fatigue. In a way it is about staying with the feeling of being weighed down by the body and working with the little [energy] one has got in the moment. So, we work with that sub-optimal source of energy and thus keep going. You learn that you can do that, however much of a struggle it feels in the moment, and that creates confidence and then in the next bad run or race that helps sustain the momentum. You learn you'll get through it, however unlikely it at first seems. (Study 2, Log 3)

Throughout training practices for both sports, the mind-body linkage is key, as participants undertake mindful, habituated action, not just in terms of the repeated actions of training but also in the ability and motivation to sustain those activities session after session, day after day, week after week, despite considerable discomfort and fatigue, both corporeal and cognitive:

I mean, it's mental what we put our bodies through. Like...you go past the point of comfort and it's not even the fact that you are really sore, and you are really struggling, you've got to carry on, you've got, you've just got to work through it. At the end of the day you can't get in and drown. Like you've got, you've got to swim, you've got to keep your body up in the water. Erm, yeah, I think, it's pushing, you've got to push through it to get better. It's a bit like DOMS¹ in the gym. They say the best way to get over it is to do more of it. So yeah, it's just physically, yeah, it's awful. It's the worst when you wake up in a morning and [you're] lying in bed and you've not moved yet, you've not done anything, but you are aching. (Study 1, Jean)

For the swimmers, engaging with the requisite variety, volume, and intensity of training (usually 8-10 pool sessions equalling 25km to over 100km, plus 3-4 gym session per week depending on event) resulted in physiological changes that developed physical endurance. Analogously, for the amateur distance runners in Study 2, training daily – and twice daily at certain points for specific purposes – resulted in weekly distances of between 80km and 150km, depending on the event(s) at which training was targeted, and produced a high level of physical endurance. Alongside this, both sporting groups simultaneously develop an embodied mind with the capacity and willingness to endure. They described how putting themselves through the training workload, and the resultant feelings emanating from this, were construed as simply part and parcel of what was required to engage in these sports. As Stephen noted of competitive swimming, 'swimming is a hard sport', and the co-researchers in Study 2 described having to 'put in the miles... to sustain the fitness levels and above all else because this is what we *do*, and in a fundamental way this is who we are' (Study 2, joint log). This involves accepting a demanding combination of both physical and mental challenges, however exhausting these are. Overcoming these challenges requires the development of mind-body endurance. As Wade noted in Study 1:

¹ DOMS - Delayed-onset muscle soreness that can be experienced post-exercise.

Yeah, I suppose, I suppose you could say I dislike, it's the ones that are mentally challenging, like the big threshold sets... I remember coming in and we once had like, erm, we came in on a Friday morning and we had a 4k meaty backstroke set, like main set, threshold. It was just, when you're going that pace for so long, doing the same stroke, it's physically tiring, it's mentally tiring. Yeah, it's tough like, really tough... during the middle of it there are points where you just think like, "what am I doing, I literally just want to stop like"... you get so close to stopping and just getting out, you're basically like, you're, you're saying in your head "I'm just so tired like, I'm just so drained" but like...

Despite this compelling desire to endure, to keep going and push themselves, both swimmers and runners also learn to identify that on some days and on some occasions, training at a sustained high level is not advisable (or even possible) as it may place the body in jeopardy and at risk of injury or over-training. This decision-making process requires the development of a highly refined level of somatic attunement and knowledge (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018) in being able to assess one's general state of being, and also in knowing when to ease off or even halt the training session. This was highlighted in one of the runner's experiences of detecting 'dys-ease' (Leder 1990) in his leg, and then taking action to avoid injury:

Half way around the route I started to feel the bulk of my right calf tightening. So immediately, I am giving it lots of focus. Am I going to get around the route with this? Can I afford still to run with it? At the back of my mind was a big left calf pull I had years ago running up through G... village, which stopped me dead for about a month. That came on insidiously – gradually spreading its evil tentacles, it even reached my soleus, until it was one big hard ball and then bang! So today I ran watching it, watching and running cautiously. It did not start to spread until I reached the converted pub, where I stopped immediately. Stretch it out gently against the wall, repeat three times and luckily it did not jam back up on me and I ran the remaining one hundred yards safely. (Study 2, Log 1)

In these situations, and as part of their endurance work (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018), runners and swimmers need to develop an ability to judge their own limits and corporeal weaknesses at any specific point, and assess whether to undertake the training session originally planned, to adjust its content, or even to abandon it and undertake some recovery work or a different session entirely. In Study 1, this was evident on a regular basis throughout Author 1's observation periods, where swimmers would be given the option of different turnaround times or simply 'swimming easy'. This usually happened in agreement with the coaches, who wanted the athletes to perform 'quality work' only when they were physically and mentally in the right place to do so. This process of self-assessment was, for the majority of the time, well received by the coaches and other swimmers, but the option to 'swim easy' or to change paces was usually only taken once swimmers had exhausted other options.

Endurance is developed, both somatically and cognitively, through lived experience, and endurance work lies at the heart of training for competitive-swimming and distance-running, not just as a part of the 'doing' of these activities, but also as a central component of athletic consciousness and general being-in-the-world. Pursuing a sociological perspective on endurance work, provides the opportunity to investigate the corporeal-cognitive nexus at work in the shaping and development of sportspeople's embodied participation in specific physical-cultural practices (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018). Drawing on Shilling's (2003: 4-5) conceptualisation of 'body projects', the enduring body can be conceptualised as a 'project' that is worked at and accomplished via habituated embodied action (Merleau-Ponty 2002). As Crossley (2001: 127) notes, habit from this sociological perspective is not automated action, but rather: 'an embodied and practical understanding of know-how' grasped and incorporated into one's bodily schema as a tacit and practical 'principle' of action. The enduring body, like other body projects, is never completed, however, for endurance is not

something that remains sedimented once and for all in the body-mind, however experienced its practitioners may be (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018); endurance and the ability to endure are contingent. This point emerged strongly in both studies; the swimmers, for example, described how endurance often has to be re-learnt after periods away from the pool, such as an end-of-season break or an injury. Below, Jean and Natasha allude to the need for such re-learning following an extended break from the sport during their sixth form studies:

Jean: So, yeah erm, I had to build my fitness up massively and I think the expectation I put on myself from the start was, not expectation, 'cos there was no expectation in regard to racing and performance but more training wise. 'Cos like I say I've always performed well in training, and I've always been a hard worker in training. Erm, so when I did start training again, I was knackered like, I was blowing out my arse, and all these people were lapping me, and I was just like, "oh my god, why can't I do what I used to do". It took me a while to accept where I was and that I need to build my way back up.

Natasha: So, when I came in September it was like a kick up the arse [laughs]. 'Cos, I was just so unfit, like, there was like a level of unfit, but I was literally, like dying. I couldn't even finish like a K [1000m], it was so bad, like for the first 3 months...I was just a mixture of mentally and physically drained, cos I was being asked to do something I couldn't, and everyone else just seemed to make it so easily. [I] was often pulled out of sessions being told it wasn't good enough...I just remember...being super unfit and we were just doing loads of, like kind of what we did this year, we did fitness for the first few weeks, so everyone was starting to get really good and I would get lapped on like, long-course, like 200 free[style]. I remember just getting lapped. That's all I remember in the first few months. Always being at the back, always getting lapped.

Learning how to endure, and indeed what actually constitutes endurance within specific sports and physical cultures, becomes a shared, intersubjective, social experience undertaken with, and communicated between, members of physical-cultural communities as highlighted

by the term ‘endurance work’ (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018). It is such intersubjectivity that we next address.

Intersubjectivity and endurance

Endurance, as we have portrayed elsewhere (e.g. Allen-Collinson et al. 2018; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2016), often involves sharing intersubjectively² the experiences of enduring physical and mental challenges, and the communication of *how* to endure within specific sports. Competitive swimmers and distance runners, respectively, often work together to learn how to tolerate and endure levels of discomfort, fatigue and pain that in other everyday-life situations would be deemed deleterious. For these athletes, bodily fatigue and discomfort are not only key structures of experience within their sporting lifeworld, but can constitute indicators of improvement or at least potential improvement in performance. Furthermore, these indicators often provide fertile ground for developing intersubjective understanding, and sharing sensory and perceptual feelings with others. In this way, endurance practitioners often ‘suffer together’, supporting, encouraging and pushing each other to go further, faster, to train harder and/or longer. As Charles (Study 1) noted in relation to co-swimming with team-mates:

If you see someone struggling you can like, you'll give them a bit of like support and then hopefully they will give it back. But yeah, that definitely helps and then, I think the other thing is like the pain's not going to last forever, like, just give it everything. Especially yesterday, I had this heart-rate set and well there was only me and Ronan doing it, it was, it was bloody hard like, knocking out 100s (100 metres) freestyle long-course, and like we'd just come out of the gym where we'd both been lifting so we were both like hurting but, err, we were just like, proper like getting each other going and like pushing each other to like go faster and faster.

² Here, we are using intersubjectivity to mean both the process and product of having experiences, knowledge, understandings, and expectations, all shared with others.

These shared experiences of mind-body discomfort and ‘dys-ease’ (Leder 1990) can serve to generate forms of embodied understanding and develop ‘somatic empathy’ (Allen-Collinson et al. 2016) with others who inhabit the same physical-cultural lifeworld. Sportspeople often become finely attuned not only to their own bodies and bodily states, but also to the bodies of others with whom they train, or against whom they race. In Study 2, for example, the runners described how they became mutually highly attuned with regard to judging how well (or not) their running-partner was feeling and their state of running-ease or ‘dys-ease’ on a particular day or at a particular time. Given the need to focus on foot-placement in running, particularly during cross-country or fell running, where the terrain is uneven and requires concentration, the use of the rapid ‘interrogatory glance’ (Sudnow 1972) was the primary means of evaluating the other runner(s):

The mutual glances took in our partner’s facial appearance: what were her/his eyes like, sunken or alert? Was his/her face relaxed and ‘loose’ or tight, frowning or grimacing? Was the skin tone normal or flushed (the latter indicating extreme effort or heat)? Similarly, posture was scrutinized: how was the neck held, retracted or extended? How high or low were the shoulders; did they look tense? How were the arms held, low or high? What was her/his stride length like, extended or shuffling, low or high? Was s/he running with a lot of lateral movement or was s/he compact? Was s/he smooth in her stride or perhaps stumbling? (Study 2, Log 3)

Such understandings and attunement are born of shared embodied experiences of endurance, and the recognition that struggle and forms of suffering are integral components of the physical-cultural lifeworld and its social community. Working together - and suffering together - was also evident in Study 1, throughout the periods of observation and in the interview data. Similar to the log entry above, swimmers, too, often spoke of recognising empathetically when others were struggling or needed support. The following fieldnote highlights such ‘togetherness’, and how the swimmers would work synergistically to help each other:

Again, it's clear that these guys are in this together all the way. Eddie, although starting the main set strongly, began to suffer with cramp early in the set. Scott, however, working next to him, was always giving him a 'come on' or 'let's go this combination this time and see if that's easier', as they were working on different individual medley combinations during the set. Working together, sharing each other's trials and tribulations as well as successes (Study 1, Fieldnote).

When asked how exactly they could recognise when others were having a bad day or needed some form of encouragement, swimmers' responses indicated a fine, nuanced attunement to one other, analogous to the runners' descriptions above. This depended on knowledge of the swimmer in question and also the specific situation. On some occasions, swimmers would simply communicate verbally and explicitly that they are 'dying' or 'fucked', whereas on other occasions they might act out of character. In such cases, swimmers would, for example, occupy a different place within the lane to their normal one, or their breathing might become more laborious than usual. Analogous to the distance runners, swimmers would also display particular facial expressions, including a vacant stare or grimacing, or body language might display a negative 'tone'; for example, with head and shoulders dropped. Identifying these bodily indicators often brought forth some form of encouragement from another member of the team, be that a simple 'come on' or a 'try and stick with me' exhortation. For certain team-members and in certain situations, however, the person might simply be left alone as it would be generally known and acknowledged to work best for that individual. The swimmers gradually built knowledge of each other over time, allowing them to attune to one another's ways of enduring, and to decide whether to provide encouragement or not, as Carol and Jessica described:

Carol: ...I feel like, especially the people that you train with in a lane every day, you see it and you notice it [suffering] and you know how they react to it [giving encouragement] when you've done it previously. So, you kind of learn from their

experience and your own experience. But sometimes generally they might just need a little bit of a pick up, so I think: aww, well I'll boost them up a little, but sometimes I just think, aww don't, don't bother.

Jessica: Yeah, it's like Susan, for example, if she's in a bad mood, and she is doing bad there is literally nothing you can say (laughs) that would help like, would want to make her swim faster. So, you just gotta leave her, and that's the best way to deal with that.

Carol: It depends on the individual.

Similarly, the runners also had learnt over many hundreds of shared training-miles when to provide verbal encouragement, and when to keep their counsel and leave a running partner to her or his own devices at points of struggle, when all energy had to be focused on enduring and struggling on:

After all the years of running together, I've come to know J's moods and ways of dealing with bad patches and set-backs, minor and more major. We both know that each other's first inclination is just to get our heads down and 'get on with it' on our own and in our own individual ways. We're very independent, we've learnt to deal with difficult times and situations on our own, and sometimes that makes it very, very difficult to let the other person in, to share feelings and thoughts. We both know that very often even just responding to an innocuous question like: 'alright, Bud?' takes too much effort. You need all your strength, determination, all your energy just to keep putting one foot in front of another. Niceties of polite conversation go right out the window. (Study 2, Log 2)

Shared lived experiences of mind-body suffering and endurance, together with knowledge of, and familiarity with, training partners and team-mates, enabled swimmers and runners to gauge the state-of-mind and state-of-body of others, drawing on 'somatic attunement' and 'somatic empathy' (Allen-Collinson et al. 2016) to shape interactional responses. In the following log extract, one of the runners recounted a set-back during his rehabilitation programme, illustrating the importance of such attunement and empathy:

Yesterday evening we had a bad patch. We decided to incorporate a small pitch... in the running for the first time... and with some trepidation we did so. We negotiated the pitch both up and down, everything seemed ok, until about 50 yards on my knee began to STAB me very sharply. By now I know what that means; it means going back weeks in terms of the programme, if not a month... I pull up quickly taking the weight on my good leg, full of dread. I sit on the ground and explode with frustration, furious expletives darken the air repeatedly. J comes over quickly to give me support. I berate my knee. I berate our decision to add in the pitch to the programme... My frustration bubbles over as I glance at the micro tape-recorder in her hand: 'Don't you dare turn that fucking thing on!' She moves around me, smoothing me down with her words, it takes her an age. I limp home awkwardly, she gives me a cuddle on the way. (Study 2, Log 1)

Endurance, particularly an enduring mind-set, is often as much needed in the face of injury and rehabilitation, as during sporting participation. At such times, it can be crucial to have the support of someone with analogous kinds of lived experience, who *knows* the degree of frustration, fury and general 'dys-ease' occasioned by injury set-backs. In such situations, and in **endurance work** more generally, this 'somatic empathy' is often engendered by recognising, in someone who shares a similar physical-cultural lifeworld, the specificity of the suffering and the endurance required.

Conclusion

In this article, we have investigated some of the key elements in the lived experience of endurance in training for two distinctive sporting lifeworlds: competitive swimming and distance running, which celebrate and valorise endurance, both cognitive and corporeal. Although practitioners within these physical-cultural domains practise their sports in very different elemental milieux, nevertheless, for these sporting groups 'doing endurance' was found to reside at the very heart of the everyday lifeworld. Endurance comes, over time, to constitute a central component of practitioners' consciousness and of their general being-in-

the-world. Such endurance may well be tested under competitive conditions during races, where the objectives of times, positions, or just finishing, encourage and often necessitate the practice of enduring. Arguably, however, it is within the more mundane context of regular, routinized training, the ‘hard slog’ of everyday, which does not directly provide such inducements, objectives and encouragements, that enduring is learnt and relearnt, and fundamentally tested. Both competitive swimming and distance running necessitate ‘putting in the distance’: up to and beyond 100km per week for the swimmers studied, and anywhere between 80km and 150km for the runners. Sensations such as grinding, heavy-limbed fatigue, and the fiery burn of a lactate-tolerance or uphill sprint session gradually become familiar and routine. Runners and swimmers learn how to interpret such sensations, rendering them meaningful within their own particular physical-cultural framework. As these sensations become familiar and normalised, experienced athletes come to realise and fundamentally *know* that they are capable of continuing with highly-demanding training (and racing) regimes, despite intense discomfort and fatigue. Novice swimmers and runners, in contrast, may not understand that it is possible to continue with such levels of overwhelming fatigue. More experienced practitioners have over time learnt how to recognise and tolerate different types and degrees of fatigue and exhaustion, allowing them to make more informed decisions, often fine-grained, vis-à-vis what their bodies may or may not be able to tolerate under differing levels of duress. Furthermore, such learning may be communicated to novices by more experienced practitioners as part of a group’s or dyad’s endurance work.

Drawing on our two different data-sets, we have examined some of the endurance practices that constitute, in Merleau-Pontian (2001) terms, habituated embodied actions, by which the ‘habit of enduring’ is developed and refined. As discussed above, from a sociological-phenomenological perspective, habit does not imply some pre-reflective, ‘automated’ action, but rather, as Crossley (2001: 127) describes, an essential practical

principle that comes into the social world via the construction of meaning, intention and appropriate action. The swimmers and runners in the above studies learn endurance over time, and come to experience and fundamentally *understand* themselves to be individuals and social groups who adopt the habit of enduring. This self- and group-perception permeates practitioners' identities and their very being-in-the-world; enduring becomes a shared cultural practice - undertaken, perceived, commented upon, discussed, and generally *known* amongst a community of practitioners. Learning how to endure, and indeed what constitutes endurance within specific sports and physical cultures, comes to form part of the 'stock of knowledge' (Schütz 1967), pertaining to certain sporting lifeworlds. Thus, swimmers and runners draw on particular 'typifications' in Schützian (1967) terms, that allow them to develop, participate in, make sense of, and evaluate, their own and others' endurance. In this way enduring can become a meaningful, shared, intersubjective, social experience; undertaken with, and communicated between, members of physical-cultural communities – that is, it becomes endurance work (see also, Allen-Collinson et al. 2018), rather than just a property or characteristic of the individual.

We have focused on two specific sporting groups in the current article, and found many shared commonalities of experience. In undertaking this analytic task, we have responded to the sociological quest to investigate in detail the embodiment and embodied learning of socio-culturally-structured practices, in order to address the lack of sociological research into the cognitive, corporeal and cultural nexus, as recently highlighted by Shilling (2017). For us, endurance, and more particularly endurance work (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018), illustrate vividly this cognitive-corporeal linkage as played out in specific physical-cultural contexts. Sociological phenomenology, we argue, provides a potent theoretical framework for identifying the deeply corporeal experience of endurance, as lived within and through the physical cultures of competitive swimming and distance running.

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