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**“Switch off the headwork!”**  
**Everyday organizational crossings in identity transformations**  
**from academic to distance runner**

Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson and John Hockey

*Winter has come with a vengeance and into the dark, wet, and cold nights we have been running, fluorescent jacketed stick figures, encased in woolen hats, gloves, and thermal tights, hugging the lit edges of parks, traffic-quiet roads, clicking up the nightly miles, looking forward to the weekend when we can again run in the light. Along we run, past uncurtained windows displaying couches full of television viewers resplendent in their comfort; past the early pub drinkers, convincing ourselves of our difference: “we” are out here, “they” are in there, convincing ourselves of our small madness, our obsession, our determined commitment to the activity which perplexes friends, family, and the bystanders who sometimes gaze curiously or hurl minor abuse.*

*The wind from the West has been blowing hard all month, hammering the trees on the parks, cascading branches downwards, making the footfall hazardous and the running difficult to sustain with any great rhythm. Balance is problematic on the often dimly-lit and badly paved routes we chart night after winter night. Then there was the “awful week” when we were both stopped literally in our tracks. On Tuesday, she stumbles over foliage and stubbornly limps through the remaining mileage, whilst on Friday he ends up slipping on a mud patch and shuffles tentatively home, swearing profusely. We sit, shocked, contemplating our injured knees, packed with ice, telling each other firmly, “it will be all right.” Shocked because it could not possibly have happened to both of us in the same week; shocked because by coincidence we both have injuries to the same part of our running bodies. We tell each other to “do the right thing,” “be sensible”; so we lower the intensity of the training, consume anti-inflammatory tablets, and for the next month we stagger and wince our way through the usual training mileage. For us, this reduction in training constitutes being sensible. We still need to put in the miles in order to feel better after the stresses of the working day, 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. In addition to our other roles of sociological researchers, lovers, son or daughter, brother or sister, we are runners. (Autoethnography, Log 3)*

Sociologists interested in the production and reproduction of “everyday life” have focused analytic attention on a panoply of different subjects, via a range of different theoretical traditions (see, for example, Back, 2015; Edensor, 2006; Hockey, 2019; Pink, 2012; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Despite increasingly widespread participation in recreational running in the United Kingdom (Hodgson & Hitchings, 2018) and other advanced industrial societies, however, there remains a relative dearth of qualitative research into the everyday experiences and identities of amateur, non-élite, and older runners. This is despite the salience of a runner identity to many of these participants, as illustrated by our narrative above (see also, for example, Abbas, 2004; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Ohlendorf, Anklam, & Gardner, 2018; Tulle, 2003), many of whom have to “squeeze” running into hectic work and domestic schedules (Hockey, 2019). Whilst there is a paucity of running research – and sport-related research more generally – within sociologies of the everyday, the converse also holds: there has until recently been scant attention paid to analyzing the everyday within the sociology of physical cultures, sport, and exercise. In recent years, a small research literature has begun to develop, which explores the mundane, embodied, sensory, and “emplaced” experiences, and practices of sport and physical cultures (Groth & Krahn, 2017; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Pink, 2011).

The autoethnographic research project portrayed here contributes to this developing corpus, by focusing on the experiences of two non-élite, amateur, middle/distance runners, one female/one male. This research charts the injury process introduced in the autoethnographic fragment at the start of the chapter. Both authors have been employed full time (and intensively) in UK universities for most of their working-lives, including substantial periods of time working at the same three institutions, and training together over many thousands of miles. Employing a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework, here we chart and explore the role of “identity work” (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Perinbanayagam, 2000; Snow & Anderson, 1995) in undertaking the identity shifts that are “worked” and negotiated in order to facilitate the sometimes difficult transition between two very different lifeworld spheres: full-time paid employment, and distance running. Such identity transitions are important in enabling social actors to disengage their primary focus from one sphere in order to move to, and concentrate on, a different sphere.

Our transitions have for decades occurred within a wider UK labor market that has been categorized as “neoliberal” (Burchell, Lapido, & Wilkinson, 2002), within which flexibility of employment has been advocated and promoted by government. As Crompton and Lyonette (2006) noted some time ago, these policies have facilitated UK (full-time) workers toiling longer on average than any of their European counterparts. At the same time, a decline in the power of trade unions and the development of a potentially 24-hour workplace via technological innovation, have increased the intensity of many working lives (Land & Taylor, 2010), particularly for professionals (e.g. Watts, 2009).

Academics are arguably part of that general category of workers. All these changes have fueled ongoing debate about “work-life balance” (Clutterbuck, 2003; Gregory & Milner, 2009) and empirical investigations of that balance or lack of it in particular occupations (Fincham, 2008), both of which have continued for at least a decade or so. This then is the general context within which we have both tried to balance the demands of our working lives and those of being committed distance runners.

For us both, running has constituted and continues to constitute an activity we designate and experience very much as “work” rather than leisure, but “body work” that is entirely different from the long hours we spend “at work” in our academic (and for Jacquelyn, former administrative) jobs, which are overwhelmingly based on sedentary “head work.” Moving into running mode therefore demarcates clearly a work-life boundary for us in terms of mind-body crossing from the world of cognitive-based paid employment to that of the “intense embodiment” (Allen-Collinson & Owton, 2015) of running, and this boundary is both temporal and spatial. As Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate (2000) note “segmentation” of work and non-work means that these domains are kept separate, with fixed, impermeable boundaries; in contrast, “integration” means that the boundaries between work and non-work are flexible and permeable (see also Clark, 2000). In our case, however, the situation is complex in that once we have crossed the boundary into the world of running; however determinedly we try to leave behind the work/employment sphere, it may cross the boundary. We sometimes discussed work during the run (including how to structure chapters for academic books!); we may well encounter work colleagues and students, who accost us with work-related remarks and even direct questions, even when we seek to be visibly out of work roles. In the evening, post-running, we are often obliged to return to working mode, whether back in the office or at home, given that being an academic requires notoriously long hours, and is certainly not a “9 to 5” job (Sang, Powell, Finkel, & Richards, 2015). The work-life boundary is thus very “blurred” and moveable in terms of having a fixed start and end time for work in any one 24-hour period (see also Wepfer, Allen, Brauchli, Jenny, & Bauer, 2017). The boundary is, though, temporal, not with regard to a fixed start time for the run at say, 19.00 each day, but is relatively fixed in terms of “fitting in” (often requiring great efforts to ring-fence this) around an hour of running, followed by post-run stretching, to each day of the working week, and, depending on training needs, at weekends.

We consider how these transformations are produced in our mundane, work-day routines via specific forms of identification, theorized within symbolic interactionism as those of materialistic and vocabularic identification. Drawing upon a long-term collaborative autoethnographic project, and to ground our theorizations, we illustrate how such identity work is routinely, but importantly, undertaken by us in the transition from the “head” work of full-time, paid employment to the mind-body work of distance-running. In addressing our topic, we first consider our symbolic interactionist theoretical approach to identity and identity work, particularly Snow and Anderson’s (1995) and Perinbanayagam’s (2000) key insights into these domains. We then portray the context of our working lives, and the research project from which our autoethnographic data are drawn, before proceeding to consider the findings under two key themes: materialistic identifications and vocabularic identifications.

## Symbolic interactionist perspectives and identity work

Sociological conceptualizations of self and identity have been subjected to intense debate during recent decades. Here, in order to focus upon the mutability, fluidity, and context-dependency of identities as emergent within the interactional milieu, we draw upon symbolic interactionist perspectives. This theoretical tradition argues for the fluid and processual nature of identities, which are construed as actively developed via interactional work between social actors, in an intersubjective, dynamic, ongoing social process (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). The relational aspects of identity are emphasized within interactionist accounts, where social “others” are argued to be key, for example, in Cooley’s (1902/2009) notion of the “looking-glass self,” and Mead’s (1934) analysis of taking the role of the other. Interactionists such as Jenkins (1996) and Force (2009) further highlight how individuals’ and social groups’ reflexive sense of identity is constituted in relation to others in terms of similarities and differences.

Snow and Anderson (1995) make a useful contribution to symbolic interaction theorizations of identity by making a salient analytic distinction between *social* identities and *personal* identities. Social identities are defined as those attributed or imputed to others, whilst personal identities are considered as the meanings attributed to the self. Personal and social identities may be highly inconsistent and deeply contested (see Allen-Collinson, 2011). Theorists working in the symbolic interactionist tradition have explored the role of sport and leisure in the construction of personal identity, including via the use of Goffmanesque “props” such as equipment, clothing, and accessories (e.g. Force, 2009; Wearing & Wearing, 2000; Williams, Allen-Collinson, Hockey, & Evans, 2018). This form of identity work emerged strongly from our research, as discussed below in relation to materialistic identification.

Identity work has been defined variously from both sociological and social-psychological perspectives, and here it is the symbolic interactionist theorization on which we draw. This approach highlights the identity management work in which individuals engage in order to try and influence the presentation of self to others (Goffman, 1969) and to self, and has been succinctly described by Snow and Anderson (1995) as:

...the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept. So defined, identity work may involve a number of complementary activities: a) arrangement of physical settings or props; b) cosmetic face-work or the arrangement of personal appearance; c) selective association with other individuals and groups; d) verbal constructions and assertion of personal identities.

(p. 241)

Analogously, Perinbanayagam (2000) has used the identity work formulation but contoured this into three forms of identification rather than four: materialistic (which combines the arrangement of physical settings and/or props with the arrangement of personal appearance), associative, and vocabularic.

Here, we focus upon both materialistic and vocabularic identifications as the most salient forms of the identity work undertaken in the transition from academic, organizational identities to those of amateur but “serious” distance runners (see also Smith, 1998). In Stebbins’ (1993) definition, serious leisure refers to the:

systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience.

(p. 23)

Furthermore, Stebbins (1992) has identified a number of defining characteristics of serious leisure, which are: (1) the requirement to persist; (2) the development of personal careers; (3) the requirement for skilled and informed effort; (4) the realization of sustained benefits (e.g., enhanced self-image and social interaction); (5) the presence of a particular normative structure; and (6) personal identification with a particular activity. For us as recreational but serious runners, these elements certainly characterize our involvement in distance running.

### The autoethnographic projects

The autoethnographic genre has now become well-established within our home discipline of sociology, and also within the sociology of sport and physical cultures (e.g., Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2001; Allen-Collinson, Jennings, Vaittinen, & Owton, 2018; Chawansky, 2015; Forde, 2015; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2006), ranging over the full continuum from analytic to more evocative forms (Anderson, 2006). The findings we consider below derive from a collaborative autoethnography undertaken by us jointly as co-runners and co-researchers.

Collaborative autoethnography or joint autoethnography is a protean and wide-ranging approach, sometimes involving just two co-researchers, whilst at the other end of the spectrum lies the involvement of many, even an entire community in the case of community autoethnographies (see, for example, Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, & Leathers, 2009). Collaborative autoethnographers adopt various models, ranging from full co-involvement at all stages of the research process to collaboration only at a specific point or points. In the “parallel” or “concurrent” approach, data are gathered independently but concurrently, and researchers then join together to share and discuss their findings, subsequently feeding these discussions back into the collaborative autoethnography, as we did in the particular project portrayed here. Before proceeding to describe our data collection and analytic approaches, we first provide some overarching context, to give a feel for our biographies as runners – and as workers in academia. When we use the term “data” (things that are “given”), we are of course mindful that findings are never just “given” (if only!) but have to be worked at, worked on, and creatively generated (see Braun & Clarke, 2013, for a discussion of “emergent” data themes).

Although we fall very firmly within the non-élite category, our running has always been undertaken as “serious leisure.” Our biographies in running collectively range over 5-mile races to marathons, requiring a substantial commitment of time and energy to training, at times seven days a week, sometimes twice a day, for 50+ years (John) and 30+ years (Jacquelyn). We are thus Masters or Veteran runners. Whilst neither of us has ever competed at elite level, we conform to Stebbins’ (1993) conceptualization of “serious leisure” with regard to our running. This “seriousness” of approach involves devoting considerable time and personal effort to running, particularly to training, which necessarily has to be completed on top of the considerable demands of full-time work.

The collaborative autoethnography was provoked by particular events when we were working at the same British university, and training together six days a week in the evenings after work. One wild, wet, windswept November week in the British winter season, we both suffered knee injuries, incurred by having to train in the winter dark as we were unable to fit our runs into our hectic working day. We soon came to a collective decision systematically to document the injury process – and, we hoped, the subsequent rehabilitative and recovery journey. Instead of our usual training logs, we proceeded to keep detailed “injury-rehabilitation logs” to record both individual and collective

engagement with our injured bodies, including our desperate desire to return to full running fitness. We exchanged thoughts and analytic ideas about emerging themes and conceptualizations, and explored any experiential differences we found in our individual accounts.

The research process lasted just over two years. Furthermore, and throughout the research, we engaged in the sociological-phenomenological *epoché* (a form of bracketing; see also McNarry, Allen-Collinson, & Evans, 2019), subjecting to analysis and question the impact of our existing meanings, beliefs, and bodily ways of knowing upon the research process. In the data extracts that follow Log 1 relates to John's entries, Log 2 to Jacquelyn's, and Log 3 to our joint analytic Log. Before proceeding to portray the two key materialistic identifications that we both found so salient in our field notes, we emphasize that as serious-leisure distance runners, we are obliged to squeeze our training time into a very temporally pressurized working day. Whilst our work circumstances nowadays are a little more relaxed, at the time of undertaking the collaborative autoethnography, our lives were extremely pressured, primarily due to the intense organizational demands of our paid employment. Our daily athletic endeavor was inexorably coming under strain from the increasing demands of an intensified labor process within Western societies generally and within the particular universities in which we were working. This intensification has been recorded since the late 1990s (see, for example, Barry, Chandler, & Clark, 2001; Craig, Amernic, & Tourish, 2014; Parker & Jary, 1995; Sparkes, 2013) with the development of widespread governmental and institutional practices of auditing UK academic work, and subsequent demands by university management for increased performance and "output." As Ylijoki and Mantyla (2003) observed some time ago, this development "attacks the traditional basic principles of academic work, including its pace and rhythm" (p. 56). They also note (2003) that with an ever-increasing schedule of formal timetabled commitments (teaching, tutorials, quality assurance meetings, etc.) "academic work begins to be reminiscent of a survival game amid too many obligations" (p. 60).

In this pressurized context, our training time had to be extracted from the working-day and protected with fierce determination. Furthermore, training had to be timed precisely and to the minute, so as to enable us to fit in this precious time. An unexpected ring of our doorbell, for example, whilst we were preparing to head out on our training route, meant that treasured time was lost – often engendering vivid cursing and swearing. Our workdays were thus tightly structured and routinized in order to accomplish work and training:

*...The alarm rings at 6.30 am and we haul ourselves into each working day, rapidly shoveling down breakfast cereal, gulping hot tea, grabbing our sandwiches and driving to work in somnolent state. At the end of the hard, working day, we speed home to prepare the evening meal, slam it in the fridge, and then rapidly haul on the running gear, scanning the sky in a vain attempt to forecast the weather conditions. Should we opt for vest or tee shirt, shorts, or tights, sun-protection cream or rain-top? We mutter to ourselves "maintain momentum," for the clock is running and any small delay, such as stopping for a cup of tea, or even answering the door bell, will result in reduced mileage that evening, so we must MOVE. Hurling out of the door into warm summer evening or chill winter night, we head out to do the running business. Post-running, we must focus on rehydrating the body, stretching weary muscles, and then consuming a carbohydrate-rich evening meal, whilst re-discovering the outside world via the evening news on television. No chance to digest our dinner at leisure as we sprint off to wash dishes, manufacture tomorrow's packed lunch and take a speedy shower. With luck, there is enough time to unwind a little before we fall into bed.*

*Such is the discipline of our working-running life, and its combined demands require the sacrifice of the majority of our social and leisure time, for apart from at weekends there is little space for socializing or leisure activity. Even at weekends, the training or racing continues and so circumscribes opportunities for other more pleasurable pursuits. A further consequence is that there remains very little time for the normal domestic activities that preoccupy our more house-proud friends, relatives, and neighbors. Domesticity assumes the lowest priority of all, and in consequence, our home environment remains chaotic: mounds of training gear litter the house, and the kitchen is a repository for multiple pairs of training shoes in various states.*

*This is the routine, the discipline of training and its impact upon the time we have available after work. Just as time is regulated and disciplined, so are our bodies, which have been transformed over decades of self-imposed repetitive practices into those typical of distance runners, with a low body-fat ratio, and gaunt features. Our bodies have gradually learnt to adjust to the fatigue levels engendered by regular training, and our running minds have simultaneously grown stoic in relation to the habitual physical rigors. Moreover, in order to train and to race effectively, we have long learnt to "fuel" our bodies as recommended by the physiological research literature: chomping rabbit-like through mounds of vegetables, and consuming goodly portions of fruit and complex carbohydrates such as cereals. We glance wistfully at the cornucopia of cakes and puddings on display in the cafés we sometimes visit on Sunday afternoons, and then settle resolutely for the relative virtues of teacakes or scones. We suspect we are, in the eyes of our nearest and dearest, "sad," but convince ourselves that this way is better for us, for our health, and for the running.*

*All these practices of course require great discipline and regular sacrifice in the face of culinary, alcoholic, social, and cultural temptations, and the moans of bemused friends and relatives who complain jocularly (and sometimes*

*seriously) that we do not love them enough to miss training... (Log 3)*

This was, then, the context in which the knee injuries occurred. As Petrie (1993) has noted,

Serious injury is one of the most emotionally and psychologically traumatic things that can happen to an athlete... Because athletes are so dependent upon their physical skills and because their identities are so wrapped up in their sport, injury can be tremendously threatening to them.

(pp. 18–19)

Whilst this point clearly applies to professional athletes, for whom serious injury can mean the loss of earnings and sponsorship, it also applies to those of us who, whilst not elite or professional, are most certainly *serious* athletes, whose identities are similarly wrapped up in our sports and/or physical cultures. The identity work required to sustain us through the injury period, described earlier, and the rehabilitative process, was thus considerable. Just as important, however, was the more routine and everyday identity work required to make the shift from our organizationally focused worker selves to the running-self. We now turn our attention to this identity work, and to two particular forms of identification that appeared so saliently in the analysis of our field notes: materialistic and vocabularic identifications.

### **Props and personal appearance: materialistic identification**

As described above, Perinbanayagam's (2000) identity work formulation combines the use of physical settings and/or props with the arrangement of personal appearance in what he terms materialistic identification. As many have noted (e.g. Grosz, 1994; Spencer, 2009), the body is an inscriptive surface upon which adornments, practices, and actions leave their mark. So it was with our running bodies, which were clearly inscribed by the activity of running. We valorized the toned muscularity of our running bodies, our cardio-vascular conditioning, and also the lightness and relative running-ease afforded by our lean bodies. In addition to this element of our materialist identification, the role of “props” in the arrangement of personal appearance was salient via the use of objects in the form of running kit, particularly in the transition from our workplace selves to our running selves. This transitional work was undertaken by us both in order to traverse what Simmel (1994) terms the “bridge” between life domains (p. 7). In the transitional zone between work and running, we engaged in various bridging practices in seeking to leave behind the hard work of the day jobs and prepare ourselves – mentally and physically – for the hard work of running. As we noted in our joint log, this preparatory work began long before the actual run commenced:

*We have both become aware that we start getting into daily running way before we put on training shoes. It starts in our individual offices, with checks for weather conditions, the more likelihood of “bad” weather, the more we are glancing out the window in the hour before we are due to finish work. Even with “good” weather we still check as one of us is not too good at running in high temperatures. On one level this helps as weather conditions influence the amount and kinds of running kit we will put on or not. It also seems to be the start of our daily athletic head preparation; the start of getting our heads ready for the forthcoming discomfort which is always there in distance running... (Log 3)*

Donning our running gear was both a functional and also a deeply symbolic practice, for whilst the clothing was carefully chosen to be comfortable and practical for the running conditions and the requisite “weather work” (Allen-Collinson, 2018), importantly, it also served as a strong indicator of materialistic identification as a distance runner. Running gear was a prop used to manage the impression of our running-selves, to indicate to both our audience of the generalized other in the form of members of the public, and to ourselves-as-audiences, that we were runners. In wet weather, for example, we donned items from our collection of Gore-Tex® jackets and waterproof or water-resistant running tights, whilst in high summer temperatures, we selected moisture-wicking shorts and vest tops. Silver (1996) has highlighted how people undergoing role transitions devise ways in which to maintain continuous identities during periods of personal change, and may invest objects with meanings that give coherence to otherwise incoherent and unsettled periods in life. In our case, these transitional objects in the form of running kit were positively cathected, and in addition to assisting us through an unsettled period, they gave us clear signals that we were making the transition to a favored self, the running-self. Furthermore, as Dant (1999) notes, objects and props play a signification role in indicating to others the social group membership of their users. Whilst we did not consider necessary any external audience validation of our membership of the distance-running community, nevertheless when acknowledgement from other members of that social group was forthcoming, it did help reinforce a sense of running identity. The following log entry was made during the injury period when neither of us was actually running but would still habitually walk around one of our principal running routes:

*Brief but cheering encounter with “Dave the Rave” [a name we gave to another runner regularly seen on our routes] this morning... As he came charging up in his usual style, he nodded and called out to John: “New Nike Peks*

(shoes)?" "Aye," responded John: "I might not be able to run, but at least I look like a runner!". "You're on the way back," was the rejoinder. It lifted our spirits. (Log 2)

Having considered the forms of materialistic identification in which we engaged, we now examine a second element of our identity work: vocabularic identification or identity talk.

### Runners' talk: vocabularic identification

This particular form of identity work relates to Snow and Anderson's (1995) conceptualization of verbal constructions and assertion of personal identities or "identity talk." This has been noted as a powerful element in the construction of personal identity (Hunt & Benford, 1994), which Snow and Anderson (1995) describe as the "verbal and expressive confirmation of one's acceptance of and attachment to the social identity associated with a general or specific role" (p. 245). Terms sometimes flung at us (and other "serious" runners we knew) were "obsessive," "exercise dependent," and even "negatively addicted" (Leedy, 2000). For us, however, such comments served only to reinforce the importance of our personal identities as runners. When confronted by such comments, therefore, we would look at each other knowingly and sometimes acknowledge the putative insult with a running cultural-insider nod, and an utterance to each other along the lines of "Great!" or "We're looking OK then!" Via such utterances and other forms of vocabularic identification, we claimed our identities as committed, serious runners. For example, a well-known term in the distance-running community in the UK is "digging in" to describe the practice of endurance in running (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2016) – whether in racing or in training. We used the term out on training runs, particularly when the going "got tough," and extra effort was required; it also came into play in other contexts, however, such as during post-injury rehabilitation (rehab). When our rehab efforts proved unusually painful, unsuccessful or frustrating, we would employ this form of vocabularic identification, exhorting one another to keep "digging in" and not to be too despondent at the lack of progress. We also reminded each other of other, past instances when endurance and digging in had been required, for example:

*Today we have been struggling with the repeat 5-minute "shuttle runs," trying to keep our running form, which is difficult because of lack of fitness... In between repeats we have been reminiscing about other struggles, like when I decided to try to reduce my asthma medication and eventually managed to come off it completely – even for running – and much to my delight. "God, there were times when I thought you were going to pass out with the effort," says John, "but you always kept going, no matter how tough it got. I reckon you would pass P-Company (UK parachute forces selection test)!" (Log 2)*

A host of other ritual utterances pervaded our work-to-run transition period also. In addition to identity talk as interaction between the two of us, and sometimes with other runners, we also engaged in identity self-talk, particularly in terms of driving us forward to "maintain the momentum" (as was oft uttered) required for the transition from organizational context to the hard work of running. For Jacquelyn, the spatio-temporal transition between the academic work-self and her running-self often began with leaving the university office and heading towards her car for the homeward journey:

*"C'mon now, keys, keys," I ritually mutter to myself as I stagger down the stairwell to the exit, fervently hoping I won't encounter any demanding students or colleagues wanting to stop for a pleasant chat. I have to get a MOVE ON! Any delay results in reduced running-time and I need to get back to runner-me. As soon as I get in the car and leave the campus, I crack on the radio. If I can't find a station with some decent rock, it's on with the Zep or Coverdale tape. I need something with a rocksteady beat, something with a lot of whack to it, something you can feel deep down... It's an energizing thing really, such a change from being so static and sedentary at work, so mind-orientated. I really need that change of tempo, to wake me up, to get everything moving so as to be ready to pull on the training gear as soon as I get home... A lot of academic thought is abstract, it's mediated and disembodied, but distance running demands right-on physicality from the very first step, when the elements hit you... (Log 2)*

And similarly for John, momentum had to be generated and maintained in the transitional zone between his university work and running, when time was of the essence:

*I always take the back stairs out of the Department and then out of the side entrance to the campus, less chance of being seen and caught up in a chat as I need to work up a head of steam to get home and prepare the evening meal, and next day's sandwiches, before training starts. I walk home hard – that's me alerting the "hours and hours at the computer body," full of stiffness, to shake itself down, and saying that the running effort is coming so "gird your loins, son!." I hit our street and walk particularly fast past Al's house, as he is retired and likes to leap out for a chat, and I have NO TIME. Blimey, how unsocial I have become! (Log 1)*

These forms of identification, materialistic and vocabularic, had routinely been employed by us in the transition from work-self to running-self. Cast into the uncertainties of "injury time," we drew on these identification processes at times somewhat desperately, trying to convince ourselves and each other that "we will be back, we will return" – to the treasured identity of runner. In the following section, we examine the ways in which the organizational demands of full-time work "provoked" the incurring of our injuries in the first place, and our resentment, anger, and frustration

toward the resultant “assault on self” (Allen-Collinson, 2011) we experienced.

### **Organizational aspects: the spectre of work**

As part of our injury-coping mechanisms, we constructed accusatory narratives regarding the spectre of work. We had long known and acknowledged to ourselves and to each other that our full-time, demanding employment was not conducive to distance running. Three weeks’ vacation was the longest period of holiday we had ever enjoyed since commencing work in academia, and before academic work, two weeks had been the maximum period of time off permitted by our jobs. Without fail, by the end of our holidays, our training performances had improved dramatically: we were refreshed and reinvigorated by the luxury of time away from the constant demands of our jobs. Conversely, most of our training and racing over the years had been “dead-legged,” and often run in a state of fatigue and even exhaustion. We frequently felt overwhelmed by fatigue of both mind and body, which flooded into our consciousness as running shoes were being laced up.

One of our oft-repeated vocabularic identifications was as *amateur* runners, obliged to squeeze our training into the one precious hour running together, which we strove to secure and keep safe from the demands of work and also of domestic labor. When confronted by accounts of professional, full-time athletes who bemoaned the arduous nature of their training regimes, our ritual response, accompanied by rolling eyes, was: “Try it on top of a full time-job!” For full-time, cognitively and socially demanding paid work (regularly 60+ hours per week) constituted the dominant problem in our lives at the time of undertaking the collaborative autoethnography portrayed here: it drained the energy from our bodies and minds, leaving us too fatigued to train with any efficiency (let alone impetus or pleasure) and made a total mockery of our carefully devised training schedules.

Running in this fatigued state undoubtedly increased the chances of incurring injuries. Furthermore, from October through to late March, we were obliged to train in the darkness during the working-week, due to the inflexibility of organizational demands upon Jacquelyn, and thereby further increasing the chances of accident and/or injury. Despite our best efforts to keep mobile, the great majority of our work lives were frustratingly sedentary, with long hours spent sitting at a desk or in meetings. Such extended sedentary time is acknowledged to be highly detrimental to the human body, and we found it highly problematic for our running bodies generally and for our injured knees in particular. The knee pain was perceptibly reduced on weekends when we were much more mobile, no longer “imprisoned” in offices, airless meeting rooms, and lecture theatres. While there are undoubtedly more demanding and dangerous occupations, the enforced sacrifice of time, energy, and health to the organizational demands of our work has undoubtedly deleteriously affected both our running body-selves and our corporeal health more generally.

### **Concluding comments**

In this chapter, drawing on findings from a long-term collaborative autoethnography and employing a symbolic interactionist analytic lens, we have examined how identity transformations are “worked” and negotiated to facilitate the transition from occupational work-selves to running-selves. Such work is salient in enabling us to move from the professional-organization sphere to a very different, cherished domain of our lifeworld, often under substantial pressure of time. To conceptualize how these transformations are achieved in mundane routines, we have employed the identity work theoretical framework of identifications, focusing specifically upon materialistic and vocabularic identifications (Perinbanayagam, 2000). The transition from the demanding work of full-time, paid employment in academia to the corporeal work of distance-running, whilst routine, certainly requires substantial work, and is worthy of sociological investigation.

During the two years from incurring the initial injury, through the long and often frustrating rehabilitation period to the point when we could both run for 60 minutes or more per day, we had managed to maintain our distance-runner identities in certain ways, but these identities – just like our corporeal selves – had been indelibly affected by the injury experience. As the rehabilitation period extended and extended, we gradually came to realize that the knee injuries actually threatened our capacity to engage in serious running, and even in any running at all. The very meaning of running was fundamentally changed for us both, and we became much more cautious and careful runners, no longer forcing our bodies to train and sometimes race through a gamut of health conditions such as heavy colds and chest infections, intense pain, or the uncomfortable knowledge that we were carrying a substantial injury. Nowadays, the longer term objective is running (and if not running, cycling, walking) into old age, for as long as our ageing bodies will permit. Running – and also other forms of physical activity – provides a much-needed and greatly valorized counterbalance, however small, to the unremittingly sedentary nature of our working lives.

To conclude with a return to our organizational biographies, we note that both of us initially entered university as mature undergraduate students after many years of toiling in non-academic work roles, much of which was unskilled labor in John’s case. We subsequently had a long struggle to join UK professional academia, during which the intensification of the labor process occurred, as depicted earlier. Despite this intensification, we have both managed to

sustain some success in academic terms, particularly with regard to publishing extensively in our chosen sociological fields. Such endeavors could be interpreted as an indicator of considerable commitment to our academic identities. That degree of commitment endures, but it has been held constantly in an adversarial relationship with our athletic practices and identities. Commitment in Stryker's (1980, 1987) view is illustrated by the severity of negative consequences that arise when individuals cease to fulfil a role centered on a particular identity. Not running, or decreasing our running, due to the demands of our organizational life, constituted (and continues to constitute) considerable threats to our athletic identities, hence the adversarial relationship. Moreover, Stryker (1980, 1987) has also pointed out that some identities have more salience than others for individuals, generating a hierarchical relationship between them.

Consistently, over the decades, our athletic identities have in many ways been assigned more value and priority than their academic counterparts, despite being entirely dependent upon the latter for earning a living. The choice of attributing a higher level of meaning to athletic endeavor is based upon the differential benefits we receive from the two very different activities. Thus, writing and publishing a chapter in an academic book (including this one!) evoke feelings of personal satisfaction, but interestingly, in the current research context in UK higher education, book chapters do not "count" in terms of "outputs" for the national Research Excellence Framework (REF), at least for the disciplines and subject areas in which we work and publish. In contrast, running for 6 miles still evokes (on good days) a feeling of being "alive," of intense sensory embodiment (Allen-Collinson & Owton, 2015).

The immediacy and embodied intensity of distance running are overwhelmingly greater than in relation to academic activity. Distance running brings what Dewey (1980) has categorized as experiences of "heightened vitality" (p. 18), hence being accorded greater meaning and value in its own right, from our perspective. In addition, over the years as we have toiled in various UK universities, we have come to realize that being able to cope with the relentless intensification and burgeoning demands of the academic labor process, and to "perform" within it, has been fundamentally and positively influenced by the psychological and physiological benefits of distance running. This awareness has then reinforced our choice to assign a higher degree of positive meaning to running – for example up a steep hill or across bleak moorland – than to checking the references for our latest book chapter (however carefully undertaken the latter may be)!

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