POSTFEMINISM & THE EXTRA MILE: MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF GENDER AND ATHLETIC IDENTITY IN WOMEN'S DISTANCE RUNNING

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Postfeminism & the Extra Mile examines representations (self-fashioned, fictional, journalistic and corporate-constructed) of women distance runners to explore contemporary discourses of gendered athletic identity. I argue for the expansion of discourse of athletic identity and opportunities for inclusion through rejection of postfeminist discourse that has risen in tandem with, and is inextricably linked to, increasing neoliberalization of sporting practice. This project is mobilised by the research question: How do women runners navigate and construct their athletic identity in the era of postfeminist discourse? My dissertation engages in discourse analysis through text (fiction, memoir, journalism) and image/text combination (social media, ad campaign).

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To my parents, my first and most important coaches in everything.

&

To Jeff, my chosen teammate.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

> Faster! Faster! But Alice felt she could not go faster, though she had no breath to say so...Now! Now! Cried the Queen. Faster! Faster! And they went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet…
>
> "Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"
>
> – Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

The world of competitive distance running has been throughout history, and continues to be, for women, like Wonderland; a place where one has to "go the extra mile!," to run "twice as fast as that!" to get anywhere, because sporting systems and institutions are designed to make them feel like it takes all the running they can do, just to keep in the same place.

"Going the extra mile!" is often employed as a motivational aphorism, one meant to suggest that it is someone's extra work/labour/determination that results in their success. In this sense, it encapsulates postfeminist ideology's rootedness in a neoliberal sensibility, both of which rely on the notion of a "choice biography," emphasis on individualism, and as preeminent scholar of postfeminism, Rosalind Gill, phrases it, "the disappearance, or at least muting of vocabularies for talking about structural inequities" (613). I include this phrase in my title as a pointed example of how distance running has been co-opted as a metaphor for this type of ideology, the very type of discourse that I argue women's running needs to resist.

I also include this phrase in my title to encourage us to shift our thinking, to see if we can frame "going the extra mile!" not as inspirational or aspirational, but to think of the *extra* mile as a symbol of systemic barriers that women face in sport–the literal "extraness" of obstacles for

women athletes, be it in the form of pay inequity, inadequate maternal protections, sexual harassment, inferior resourcing, physiological bias, and so much more. If you and your opponent line up to race, and your course is a mile longer than theirs, is going the extra mile really something to be celebrated?

If you want to "get someplace" in the sport as a woman, the contemporary running industry Wonderland suggests you adopt a postfeminist ideology, become a "Can-Do" girl, a role model, an "athlete brand," and, crucially, fit a very narrow gendered, racialized, sexualized, and able-bodied idea of what it means to be a high-level female runner. While Alice individually might not have had the breath to say no (she was too tired from all that running!), collective action, a chorus of voices, a communal rejection of postfeminist ideology and the ways it entangles with sport culture, is what will make the sport not only faster, but also safer, more inclusive, and more equitable.

When I was first brainstorming this project, I titled it *Postfeminism and the Extra Mile: Media Representation of Fender and Athletic Identity in Elite Women's Running*. And then one of my mentors asked me what it meant to label a body as "elite." In her own writing, Elizabeth Wheeler frames the question as: "The more specific we get about situated knowledge, the more we encounter the problem: *whose body will be exemplary?*" (554 emphasis). This question has haunted this project. I believe that now more than ever athletes, allies, and fans are ready to engage in more thorough analysis of the dominant performance storyline, with greater attention to broader cultural issues of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and corporatization. Doing so within the realm of women's distance running, is the intervention of my project.

If you look at the history of distance running, my premise that women are the ones running the extra miles certainly seems off-base.[1] The men's marathon, as competed within the modern Olympic Games, is 126 years old. It is an original event, contested from the first modern Olympics in 1896.[2] Women, on the other hand, have only had the opportunity to race distances *over 200m* at the Olympics for 62 years. The 800m was contested when women's athletics were first added in 1928.[3] However, the male-dominated media, International Olympic Committee members and administrators had preconceived notions that women were too fragile to run this distance, worrying that it would damage their reproductive systems and thus prevent them from fulfilling every woman's true purpose–to be a mother. In direct contradiction to the events that transpired on the track, media reported afterwards that several women collapsed and others could not finish the 800m race. This account gained traction despite photographic and video evidence showing that all nine women finished the race, and that a couple of them lay down on the track after a world-record effort, as was common for male-athletes to do. As the 1984 IOC Vice-President Anita DeFrantz framed it: "members of the press chose to write what would suit the purpose of the male-dominated administration" (np). That misogynistic sporting administration then proceeded to bar women from competing in races longer than 200m for over three decades,

[1] Distance running is defined as track events 1,500m and over, road racing distances (5K, 10K, half and full marathon) and cross-country (XC).

[2] The 10,000m and 5,000m were added for men in 1912, the 3,000 steeple in 1920.

[3] As white women largely abandoned the sport in the 1930s, Black women's participation rose. Black women's excellence at sprinting distances (the only ones allowed) in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s was connected to the support of women's track by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Tuskegee Institute formed the first highly competitive women's track team in 1929, recruiting African American high school girls and winning 11 out of 12 Amateur Athletic Union Championships between 1937-1948. Susan Cahn argues that Black women migrated towards track as white women migrated away, in part because "African American women did not tie femininity to a specific, limited set of activities and attributes defined as separate and opposite from masculinity" (252). Thus, it is important to note both the gendered and racialized history of sprint and mid-D distances before the women's marathon was added in 1984.

under the patronising guise of "protecting" women from themselves. In this Wonderland-like sense, it took all the running these women could do, to be told they shouldn't run at all.

The Olympic women's marathon is only 38 years old, first contested at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. I think about that often when I'm at races–that the women's Olympic marathon is only 10 years my senior, and that many women I line up with may remember a time before women's marathoning was recognized by the IOC and other marathon majors. It is within my lifetime that women finally gained the opportunity to race the 5,000m (1996) and the 3,000m steeplechase (2008). I made it through the Canadian university system before distance parity was enacted for collegiate running. Instead, I moved through a system in which my teammates and I ran shorter distances than the men's team while administrators twisted themselves in knots trying to explain how it wasn't a concrete symbol of women being treated as though they weren't as made for distance running. In this case, we could put in all the extra miles we wanted, but we still weren't allowed to go as far as the men. Women's distance running, as formally recognized in patriarchal sporting systems, is still quite young; a fact that is easy for those of my generation, who have always had competitive opportunities, to forget.

As such, *Postfeminism & the 'extra mile'* is temporally situated in the 1970s - present, to capture the vast transition that the sport of running has undergone within the last 50 years, and also to explore how the cultural origins of women's running as formally recognized in competition continue to haunt the industry and activity today. My focus on distance running, rather than women's track and field as a whole, is to respect the related, but different, racialized and classed histories of these disciplines.[4]

[4] For further reading on the history of Track and Field specifically, I recommend Cat M. Ariail's *Passing the Baton: Black Women Track Stars and American Identity* (2020).

In the late 60s/early 70s, the USA experienced a "Running Boom" (or "Jogging Boom") in which recreational running gained popularity within white, middle-class circles as a leisure activity meant to counteract the increasingly sedentary American lifestyle. During this "Boom" women's distance running joined what Michael Messner terms the "sport-media-commercial-complex" which mobilised postfeminist ideology. In this complex:

> the corporate individual appropriation of feminist empowerment as synonymous with the development of one's athletic body tends to deflect awareness of institutional arrangements. Instead, women's 'feminist' agency, especially among women privileged by class and race, is diverted towards mass consumption [...] (2003).

Middle-class, able-bodied, white women at the forefront of the distance running movement in the United States, such as Kathrine Switzer, worked with corporate sponsors to associate running with "liberated athletic femininity" (Ariail 2009). That is to say, American women's distance running has been steeped in white, ableist, middle-class, postfeminist discourse from its beginning. After the addition of the women's marathon to the Olympics in 1984, the growing industry led to a transformation from "liberated athletic femininity" to the "ideal female runner," which placed primacy on being fit (read: thin, able-bodied), "healthy," and engaged in heterosexual relationships (Ariail 2009). This combined with the sport's earlier racialized and classed foundation.

This cultural context has continued to haunt American and Canadian women's running to this day, at which point women's distance running is, from a performance perspective, at a higher level than ever. The fields are deeper, and the competition is faster than it ever has been, a phenomenon owing to the explosion of women's recreational road race participation in the 2000s, prominent Marathon Major wins by American women such as Shalane Flanagan (NYC 2017) and Desiree Linden (Boston 2018), and solidified by double the number of women than

men qualifying for the US Olympic Marathon Trials in 2020. Due to the newly thriving performance level of Canadian and American women's distance running, it can be easy to think that women's running has finally "made it"—that the activism of previous generations has won out, that feminism is no longer needed, Yet, the groundswell of dialogue regarding abuse, exploitation and dismissal within the sport, particularly in the last decade, suggests that communal, intersectional feminist action is imperative, and is being embraced by many athletes in resistance to an industry-wide affinity for "popular" feminist rhetoric that leaves oppressive structures intact.

Women's competitive running is at its most popular, and, seemingly, its most problematic (or, rather, its most willing to talk about issues within the sport). This dissertation explores how athletic identity becomes gendered within Canadian and American distance runners, but it does so with the understanding that neither women, nor athletes, are homogenous groups; the consideration of how identities intersect and result in overlapping structural and systemic discrimination or inequality, are kept forefront in discussions of identity. In simplest terms, athletic identity refers to an individual's understanding of her/themself as an athlete; race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability and class influence one's understanding of one's athletic identity.

My dissertation takes women's distance running as its field of study and postfeminist critique as its methodology. I utilize Cheryl Cole's (1994) description of feminist cultural studies within sport as its theoretical underpinning, framing sport as:

> a discursive construct that organises multiple practices (science, medicine, technology, governing, institutions and the media) that intersect and produce multiple bodies (raced, sexed, classed, heterosexualized, reproductive, prosthetic,cyborg) embedded in normalising technologies (classification, hierarchization, identity production) and consumer culture (5).

Influenced by Foucauldian poststructuralism, Cole asserts that sport is "most usefully understood as a technology in the Foucauldian sense: an ensemble of knowledges and practices that disciplines, conditions, reshapes and inscribes the body through the terms and needs of a patriarchal and racist capitalism" (1994). Postfeminism ideology is not a theoretical lens of this project, but rather its intersection with the sport of running is the *phenomenon* at analysis. Rosalind Gill refers to postfeminism as a "blending of a kind of individualized feminism with neoliberalism" (2007). Angela McRobbie identifies it as the "taking into account" of feminism, deployment of terms like "empowerment" or "choice," and the assertion that women can now "have it all." Such terms are employed within individualistic discourse "particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism," which, under this logic, is no longer necessary (McRobbie 2008, Harris 2004, Azzarito 2009). According to postfeminism, when it comes to sport, girls and women can "just do it" now, as per Nike's slogan.

You might be thinking: "But we talk about feminism more than ever now! Isn't Nike's emphasis on girls "just doing it" in sport itself a feminist statement?"

This is where the intervention of media and gender scholar Sarah Banet-Weister is crucial to note. Rather than being displaced by popular feminism, postfeminist ideology is actually sustained by it. Popular feminisms such as celebrity feminism, corporate feminism, or commodity feminism most often gain traction and visibility precisely *because* they do not seek to reform structural inequities, and frequently obscure oppressive situations. McRobbie sees these cultural situations as "perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminisms" (15). I engage in critique of postfeminist ideology's entanglement with, and examine

the cultural context that supports the proliferation of postfeminist rhetoric in distance-running to explain how and why this phenomenon is occurring, and argue for resistance against it. I do not engage in this critique for the purposes of accusing individual athletes of "not being feminist enough," as they navigate their way through sporting systems and broader social context.

As sport and gender scholars Kim Toffoletti, Holly Thorpe and Toni Bruce note, there is an immense challenge to making sense of a contemporary sporting and media context that "increasingly engages female athletes as active, visible, and autonomous, while inequalities pertaining to gender, sexuality, race, and class remain stubbornly persistent across sport institutions and practices" (359). As such, it is most useful to, following Sarah Banet-Weiser, dwell in the *ambivalences* of sport culture, and ask research questions instead that dwell in such ambivalence, like: "How do we understand the workings of gender (in)equality in sport?" and "How might we theorise the ambiguities and multiplicities encompassed in the production of contemporary sporting femininities?" (Toffoletti et al 360). These questions inform my own overarching research question: How do women runners navigate and construct their athletic identity in the era of postfeminist discourse?

To answer this question, I turn to four very different (and yet interrelated) genres of media representation of women runners: fiction, memoir, advertisement, and social media. These media representations include those that are fictitious, self-fashioned, and corporate-constructed. Fictitious representations allow for imaginative engagement with the experience and potentialities of running feminisms. Self-fashioned representations allow for the exploration of runners' own understanding of their running identity within their cultural context and as organised by the affordances of particular genres like the memoir, or delimited by the squares and interactivity of an Instagram feed. Corporate-constructed representations allow for the

analysis of neoliberal institutions' engagement with, or manipulation of, running femininities and feminisms.

I situate myself not solely as a literary and cultural studies scholar, but also as a former collegiate runner with a background in running-focused sport journalism. Due to my own experience within the sport, my own identity, voice, and experiences are more present in this text than perhaps traditional in formal academic writing. I maintain that my own running experiences, and interactions with media representation of women runners are also important forms of evidence.

The scope of the project demands an agile interdisciplinary approach that builds from literary studies' dedication to analysis of the relationship between *form* and *content*. As is clear in recent qualitative research, the social sciences of sport has experienced a narrative turn that has compelled researchers to turn away from "neutral" or "objective" perspectives and toward the more literary understanding that "the conventions of the text and the language forms used are actively involved in the construction of various realities" (Sparkes 2002). This statement stands true with regard to representations of a particular identity across media and genre, such as the fiction, memoir, advertisement, journalism and social media examined in this dissertation.

The methodology for this project is unprecedented in that it combines the humanities (feminist theory and praxis, postfeminist critique, literary studies, cultural studies, disability studies) and social sciences (sport psychology, cultural approaches to kinesiology) and takes both qualitative and quantitative forms. I am influenced at the macro-level by critical discourse analysis (CDA) and close-reading methodologies from literary studies, but chapter has a methodological life of its own. The differences between chapters demands more changes in authorial tone than is sometimes comfortable for a literary scholar but is necessary in order for

me to oscillate between genres and navigate both my removal from and embeddedness within the community I am studying.

CDA focuses on "relations of power, dominance and inequality and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through talk and text" and identifying "underlying ideologies that play a role in the reproduction of or resistance against dominance of inequality" (Locke 12). I am specifically invested in feminist-oriented CDA, which analyzes "how gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in text and talk" (Lazar 150).

A few more key terms foundational to my analysis: I study postfeminism as a "distinctive kind of gendered neoliberalism" within our contemporary *brand culture*. A "brand" is defined as a reciprocal relationship intersecting marketing, products, and consumers. Referring to "brand cultures" acknowledges how "these types of branded relationships have become cultural contexts for everyday living, individual identity, and affective relationships" (Banet-Weiser). In particular, brand cultures have infiltrated spaces that we tend to think of as the most "authentic"—including personal identity. I examine the representation of athletic identity, a space we tend to think of as authentic, and how it interacts with a postfeminist brand culture. As such, it is not just my advertising-focused chapter that is considering the "branding" of the self as a woman runner (and what that entails). In chapter two, "What We (Don't) Talk About When We Talk About Running: Memoirs of 'fast girls,'" and chapter four, "#VeryFunJob: Instagram and athletic identity in Olympic women runners," I examine how competitive women runners engage with and resist postfeminist self-representation as they engage genres that, in our

contemporary moment, are inherently a practice of self-branding. Memoirs and Instagram profiles are in a very literal sense, a "crafting" of the self for public consumption.

If you ask a member of a marketing department what a brand is, they might give you a simpler answer than the definition I just offered; they'd likely tell you that a brand is a story that you tell to the consumer about a particular corporation, organisation, or person, but also a story you tell a consumer about themselves. Branding is more storytelling than it is pure commodification. I don't see the definition of a brand as a "story" and as a reciprocal relationship between marketing, product, and consumer as contradictory.

And perhaps we have now finally got to the bottom of the question of why a *literary* scholar would be studying postfeminist rhetoric and ideology within women's running; and we also get to the bottom of the thread that connects these different genres of media. Form impacts content, different types of stories may be more or less "expected" in certain generic forms.

Sport, as a cultural practice in North America, has an overarching story that it tells. Sport psychologists Kitrina Douglas and David Carless term this common storyline "the performance narrative" (73).[5] The performance story is recognizable to anyone who has participated in or consumed representations of sport. It encourages a subsumption of identity into sport. Performance stories, with their emphasis on achievement "often reveal the fragile nature of self-worth when it is dependent on sport performance, and show how a glorified self and exclusive athletic identity becomes problematic during performance fluctuations or when the storyteller contemplates withdrawal from sport" (Carless and Douglas 73). Thus, an essential

[5] For the purposes of this project, I utilise the terminology "performance story/storyline" rather than "performance narrative," to acknowledge the differentiation of terminology between "narrative" and "story" within literary narratology. Carless and Douglas' term, "performance narrative" has been widely used in the area of cultural sport psychology since 2016. For further reading on the intersection and potential collaboration between literary and sport psychology narrative approaches, see my article, "Restorying the performance masterplot: Narrative approaches to Jaclyn Gilbert's *Late Air*."

question within cultural sport psychology has become: how can the processes through which the performance storyline is naturalised as the masterplot of sport be made transparent to athletes, coaches and consumers of sport media? (Carless and Douglas 24). Carless and Douglas opine that "public portrayals," that is sport media of the kind considered in this project, help create "a particular shape of story that encapsulates what sport is and what sport means" (22). Literary scholars Angie Abdou and Jamie Dopp stereotype the skeleton of the performance story as:

> [It] starts with an underdog who decides to go for it. He (yes, it is almost always a he) trains and trains and trains. He experiences some victory, and the audience becomes deeply invested in his success. But then he experiences an obstacle [...] He appears to give up, to quit. Cue the dark, moody music...But don't despair! [...] He decides to 'give it all he's got!'—to 'go for it!' Of course, sport rewards his efforts. He wins, and we end with our hero on the podium, arms raised high (7).

The type of narrative habitus that upholds the performance story is a "win-at-all-costs" mentality.[6]

Distance running, a sport that depends so much on delayed gratification and long bouts of training (in terms of both individual sessions and training blocks) is particularly vulnerable to (ableist) "mind over matter" type rhetoric. Speed is often seen as a "gift," a talent that one has or doesn't, whereas aerobic capacity is often presented as something that anyone can grind their way to (despite, of course, the fact that competitive marathoners are no less innately talented than competitive sprinters).

This sense of marathoning in particular as the sort of "layperson's grind" also figures in the way that marathoning shows up as a popular metaphor. I completed grad school, which I was

[6] Narrative habitus makes a collection of stories recognizable to a community, as well as renders individuals capable of knowing when certain stories are appropriate, and what audience to direct them.

frequently told was "a marathon, not a sprint," during a global pandemic that was also touted as "a marathon, not a sprint." While these metaphors are meant to convey the need to "pace" oneself and work in a consistent, measured way, I think they also speak to the way that marathons are often figured as a symbol of psychological strength/mental fortitude. We describe things as marathons when they are very long, and very difficult.

I am not suggesting that marathoning does not require mental strength. But I do think it is unhelpful to premise success, be it in grad school, or in a footrace, as being solely related to the effort one puts in. This performance narrative habitus elides who has to run those "extra miles;" it does not account for the ways that systemic bias shows up, be it in universities, in health care systems, or in sporting industries and organisations.

How does the performance narrative habitus interact with a contemporary postfeminist cultural sensibility? The performance narrative habitus when engaged by women is inherently postfeminist in that it relies on the conceptualization of sport as a meritocracy, an equal playing field. The performance narrative habitus relies on ideas of hard work, focus and "going all in" to achieve a goal, to prioritising athletics over all else to achieve success, and in the process, becoming a role model. As such, there is not much room within the performance narrative habitus for acknowledging that sport is not a true meritocracy, that it always has and continues to be entrenched in systemic sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia–that sport has always offered more opportunities for some than others. When unfairness is acknowledged, the sporting narrative habitus allows for the framing of discrimination as something to be "overcome" through "proving" one's athletic prowess.

Just like the fantasy of the American Dream, this idealised meritocracy, as is clear in Abdou and Dopp's quip, is rooted in masculinity and an assumed white, able-bodied, male

subject. For women athletes and particularly girls/young women early in their competitive sporting experiences, the performance storyline's encouragement to go all in and conflate identity with athletics, to work hard for success, is refracted through the requirement that, as girls, they must *prove* themselves as athletes in a way that men do not. In my own experience, I'm thinking about how many times I've heard an impressive sub-elite woman marathoner's personal best (let's say around 3 hours), described as a "good men's time!" as a "compliment."

The prevailing market-oriented postfeminist cultural sensibility has shaped a generation. Gill identifies the following as key elements of a postfeminist sensibility: 1) the notion of femininity as a bodily property, 2) an emphasis on self-surveillance, and 3) discourse of individual choice/empowerment (147). Each of these elements interacts with the sporting performance narrative habitus in distance running, often resulting in 1) the need to emphasise femininity as a woman athlete, or to see distance running as a gender-appropriate sport associated with an able, heterosexually-attractive body, 2) to engage in self-surveillance and bodily manipulation for a combination of performance and aesthetic related goals, as well as the surveillance of and comparison between other bodies in the sport, and 3) the need to espouse one's athletic success as a matter of individual determination. Girl studies scholars have proposed multiple terms for the idealised subjectivity put forth by postfeminist sensibilities, including "Alpha Girls" (Kindlon), "Future Girls," "Can-Do Girls" (Harris) or "Top Girls" (McRobbie). These girls are held in contrast to "At Risk Girls," who lack self-confidence and the drive for success in sport and beyond (Harris). Young women are encouraged to engage with the Future Girl/Alpha Girl ideal within the performance narrative habitus in sport and neoliberal society beyond, by seeing their own success and that of others as a product of hard work on an equal playing field and will ignore or reject systemic barriers to success. As such, although the

Alpha Girl/Future Girl identity, like the American Dream is *presented* as universally accessible, in reality it is steeped in whiteness, wealth, and ideas of gender and sexual normativity.

In my first chapter, "Once a runner, twice a woman: Women's running literature 1970-2020" I analyse four short stories and one novel spanning this time period: "Raymond's Run" by Toni Cade Bambara (1971), "The Loveliness of the Long-Distance Runner" by Sara Maitland (1983), "Running" by Joyce Carol Oates (1992), "Her Marathon" by Jenifer Levins (1992), and *Late Air* by Jaclyn Gilbert (2018). I argue that women's running fiction post-1970 consistently draws attention to gendered oppression with the sport, rejecting the hyperableist masculinist performance masterplot in favour of intersecting subjectivities.

In my second chapter, "What We (Don't) Talk About When We Talk About Running: Memoirs of 'fast girls'" I argue that postfeminist discourse achieves narrative salience in the memoirs of contemporary distance runners through the manipulation of particular tropes related to structure, theme, and audience. The greater the success a woman runner has had in the sport, the more closely her memoir is likely to align with the performance masterplot–and the more likely it is to be commercially successful. However, athlete memoirs that use personal experience to interrogate sexism, to consider physical and psychological trauma within high level sports, and to question the "win-at-all-costs" attitude are important resources for opening dialogue beyond postfeminist imperatives to "dream big!"

Chapter three, "Just Do It, Just *Dream Crazy*: Athlete Rejection of Nike's Postfeminism" analyses the 2019 Nike "Dream Crazy" ad campaign as the corporation's latest use of postfeminist discourse as a marketing strategy. I argue that Nike represents women's potential achievement in sport as a matter of hard work and individual ambition, eliding structural barriers to participation. "Dream Crazy" is the latest in Nike's long history of leadership in

"femvertising" and "empowertising" trends that hide postfeminist individualization practices and investment in neoliberal ideology under the guise of popular feminism (Zeisler 29). This postfeminist discourse is inherently "post-racialized," "post-ablebodied" and "post-homophobic," constituting a further violence against marginalized communities within sport broadly. Beyond the advertisements themselves, the *New York Times* opinion editorials of professional runners Alysia Montaño, Kara Goucher and Allyson Felix in response to the ad campaign are included as primary texts. These op-eds demonstrate an intersectional-feminist resistance to postfeminist discourse, particularly focused on rejecting professional running's framing of pregnancy as injury, or something to 'bounce-back' from immediately. These athlete-activists work addresses sport's continued fear of and obsession with women's reproductive systems, as the attitudes that resulted in the banning of the women's 800m in 1928 linger in the sport.

In chapter four, "#VeryFunJob: Instagram and athletic identity in Olympic women runners" I consider not just *how*, but *why* Canadian and American Olympic distance runners advance themselves as "pretty and powerful" athlete-*brands* via the visual-centric social media platform, Instagram. I argue that Olympic women runners leverage body capital, engage in relentless (and sometimes toxic) positivity, and present a solely-athletics focused identity on the social media platform in response to pressure within contemporary brand culture to present as a "Can-Do girl."

As the chapters progress, the genres addressed become increasingly visual. Gill states that "one of the most striking aspects of postfeminist media culture is its obsessive preoccupation with the body," in which femininity becomes "defined as a bodily property" and the body "is presented simultaneously as women's source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant

monitoring, surveillance, discipline…" (149). Brand cultures exist in "economies of visibility" in which the "product" is the feminine body and in which feminisms that are the easiest to commodify become the most visible (Banet-Weiser 54, 13). The fiction analysed in chapter one labours the most to reject a postfeminist performance narrative habitus, while the intrinsically visual platform, Instagram, studied in chapter four has the strongest incidence of athletes projecting a postfeminist self-brand. The fiction of chapter one also features characters diverse in age, race, sexuality, and ability, whereas the post-feminist branding (and celebritization) of athletes seen in chapters two and four broadcast the white, middle-class, cis-gendered, heterosexual (and hetero*sexy*) perquisites for postfeminist visibility. This supports Banet-Weiser's claim that "popular feminism that is most visible is that which is white, middle-class, cis-gendered, and heterosexual" (13).

It is my goal to write *Postfeminism & the extra mile* in a way that is legible not only to the academic community, but also the distance running one. Through analysis of the discourse of athletic identity and thus the unpacking of practices and forms of knowledge that discipline and inform bodies, I seek to demonstrate not only the opportunity that media representations of women runners have to expand such ideas of athletic identity when they reject postfeminism discourse, but also the exigency of doing so. "Just do it," "Dream crazy" and the promise that "going the extra mile" is all one needs to achieve greatness are seductive assurances that support a performance narrative habitus that is hostile towards true equity, diversity, and community in sport. So, let's unpack who and what polices the extra mile, how it got there, and who is "allowed" to run it.

CHAPTER II:

ONCE A RUNNER, TWICE A WOMAN: WOMEN'S RUNNING LITERATURE

1970-2020

> The marathon, the most universally known of all running events, and a major cultural phenomenon of our modern age, derived from the legend of a Greek warrior messenger who fell dead as he delivered his message of victory. Or does it? [...] The truth–or a closer version of a very elusive truth–may be that it derives from a French professor happening to read a minor English poem, which happened to follow an accidental mistake made by a writer seventeen hundred years earlier.
>
> – Roger Robinson*, Running in Literature*

Introduction

Distance running has a legacy intertwined with the interpretation and misinterpretation of literature. The sport of cross-country was inspired by the 1857 novel *Tom Brown's School Days*. The modern Olympic marathon exists, as my epigraph to this chapter notes, because of Professor Michel Bréal's (mis)reading of Robert Browning's poem, "Pheidippides," which combines the recorded stories of Pheidippides with that of Eucles/Thersippus and gives us the dramatic tale of a warrior dropping dead at the end of his run from Marathon to Athens, but not before exclaiming, "Rejoice! We conquer!" As running and literature scholar Roger Robinson writes, Browning's poem transformed the sport of long distance-running from "seedy activity" into one that:

> gave a symbolic focus to an idealistic movement for international unity that had not yet been born (the revived Olympics). It led in time to one of the best expressions of the culture of twentieth and twenty-first century city society, the big-city street race; Boston, New York, London, Chicago,

> Berlin, and many other great cities are greater, better, and culturally richer because of their marathons […] Not many poems achieve as much. (119)

Running history is a literary history. In the mid-2000s to 2010s I was an increasingly competitive teenage runner and bibliophile, looking to devour whatever I could about the sport—fiction, non-fiction, magazines, you name it. And though there was a female model on the cover of almost every issue of *Runner's World* or *Canadian Running Magazine* (that my teenage brain noted as being much thinner and prettier than me) there was way less content inside the magazine about elite women than about elite men. And while I read all the texts that are "must-reads" or "cult-classics" for runners, all I could notice was that there either weren't any women, or they were featured as love interests/distractions.

This isn't a running-only phenomenon. Surveying American sports novels through 1980, only 94 out of the 1834 were authored by women (Oriard). Even fewer featured women athletes as the protagonist. So why does this matter? Fiction can help us understand slow and subtle changes in attitudes towards phenomena and identities, as it is in constant, two-way, conversation with society (Jones 8). Using close-reading methodologies including noting "denigrating quotes, stereotyped behaviour patterns, character treatment, plot involvement and denouements" that are assigned to women athletes in fiction is a way of investigating broader social discourse and schemas regarding women's athletics (Jones 8). Most frequently, when women (broadly, not just women athletes) are featured in sport literature, it is as the "adversarial foil to sportsmen" (Sandoz 32) or they appear, as "problem, prey, or potential sacrifice," (Messenger 161) or "as spectators of sport" (Jones 37).

I didn't know all of this as a teenager. I just knew that I didn't feel seen in a lot of these books that everyone said that runners love. And when I read John L Parker's *Once A Runner* as a collegiate runner, rather than seeing myself in Quenton Cassidy, I was frustrated by how his

girlfriend Andrea was portrayed. Their meet-cute involves him (unsolicited) "correcting" her running form while she is at the track, she is framed as being completely incapable of understanding Quenton's dedication to the sport, and despite loving her, their relationship is "sacrificed" by Quenton in order to make running his sole focus.

And so despite *Once A Runner* being published in 1971, in 2014, I wrote a book review of it for *Canadian Running Magazine*, outlining the issues with Andrea's characterization, along with a glorification of overtraining and a fatphobic condescension towards runners who don't train at a certain level (I mean the first lines of the book make fun of the "plump, determined-looking women slogging along while fleshy knees quivered...dream[ing] of certain cruel and smiling emcees: bikinis, ribbon-cuttings, and the like...:"). The review actually got the attention of John L Parker himself, who commented on it that if I didn't like the book, I shouldn't have read it. Which kind of says a lot in and of itself about how "fiction accepts the masculine exclusivity of the sports world without reflection and without consideration of the consequences" (Oriard 179).

As a teenager, I was sure that there must be women's running fiction out there—but that it wasn't getting distributed or celebrated in the same way as much of the fiction written by and about men. As a scholar, I can now see that this is because women's running literature frequently rejects the masculinist performance storyline that is schematically entrenched in sport literature, the one featuring an underdog hero who, against all odds and by overcoming all obstacles through sheer determination, ends up on the podium or winning the game. Michael Oriard, writing about American sport literature (by which he means American sport literature written by and featuring men) states that "the sports world itself is the particular domain of heroes, and the fiction that describes sport must focus on this essential fact" (25). Simply put, masculinist sport

literature has no time for those who are not "winners." Furthermore, Oriard argues that (masculine) sport fiction epitomises

> American dreams, fears and obsessions; qualities like rugged individualism, teamwork, striving for the pinnacle of one's profession, self-reliance, fair play and fear of retirement or failure are as intrinsic to American attitudes towards life as they are about sport. Sport is both a metaphor for American life and an escape from the banality or complexity of life. It is an expression that those values—like equal opportunity—truly exist in the society (8).

The authors whose work I am studying in this chapter—Toni Cade Bambara, Jenifer Levin, Joyce Carol Oates, Sara Maitland and Jaclyn Gilbert—are all Americans. Yet, their representation of sporting women is an outright rebuttal of so many of these "quintessentially American" values that Oriard says for which sport (and sport fiction) serve as a metaphor. Rather, for these authors, sport can be a space of exclusion and harassment, and certainly not one of equal opportunity. In their works, there isn't always a singular hero. When Oriard writes of American sport fiction being representative of the American experience, he means for men, and primarily straight, white, able-bodied men. As Ann-Kailani Jones says in response, "If sport is the American experience, then it is an experience that neglects females" (165).

Contextualizing Sport Fiction

Fiction depicting women athletes in the early 20th century has two discrete clusters: fictional depictions of competitive women written *by women* often portrayed these athletes as "strong, serious, accomplished, healthy, happy, even central" (Sandoz 33). Fictional depictions of sportswomen written *by men* often portrayed women athletes as "dangerous, abnormal, laughable, inept, shallow, peripheral" (Sandoz 34). Despite characters frequently having some sense of agency, girls' stories of school athletics in the 1910-30s tended to create a separate

world for girl athletes, thus avoiding directly contradicting broader gender norms.[7] Textual thematics also placed limits on these athletes' agency, as Sandoz notes, "writers present individual bids for glory negatively," and sport participation is frequently tied to nurturing motivations rather than personal ambition (37). Like Sandoz, Michael Oriard notes that the few examples of juvenile works written featuring girl athletes (which are vastly outnumbered by those featuring boy athletes) such as Edith Bancroft's Jane Allen series, "refuse to take sport seriously," instead using it as a precursor to marriage and motherhood (11).

In the mid 1920s, women's sport fiction began to move beyond the realm of the story meant for girls and into that for adults. The woman athlete's involvement in sport was frequently represented as putting her "under considerable duress" from going against her true nature (Jones 55). The woman athlete was most often depicted as emphatically feminine and heterosexual to placate gender anxiety (Sandoz 42).[8]

My focus is on the period when authors began offering representation of women's sport not as a separate, pre-marital, feminine space, but also without co-opting the tried and true masculinist performance plot. Joli Sandoz pinpoints Bambara's "Raymond's Run" (1971) as the heralder of a "new fictional image of sportswomen" (57). Differing from Sandoz, Michael Oriard instead pinpoints Jenifer Levin's novel *Water Dancer* as the marker of a significant shift in women's sport fiction, calling the 1987 novel the "first credible alternative to the masculine sport myth" (the "performance storyline"). Oriard notes that from the 19th century on, men have written "thousands of sport novels for boys with a single plot: a story about achievements in the face of severe competition, with fair play and other virtues conspicuously promoted but with

[7] For example the Nancy Drew series (Carolyn Keene), and The Meadow-Brook Girls series (Janet Alridge).
[8] For example, Suzanne Lenglen's *Love Game* (1926), the first adult women's sport novel published in the United States, presents its female characters as objects of heterosexual desire. Sandoz notes that this trend continues for decades to follow.

heroic action and triumph overwhelming all other concerns" (10). This is a representative description of the performance storyline. The girls' novels of the 70s begin to represent what Oriard describes as a "realistic," but not "mythic" (in the sense of the performance storyline) girl athlete: "By distinguishing between the realistic from the mythic I point to the larger function that boys' books have served in articulating a myth of success in a competitive world and for which women writers have offered no alternative until recently" (13). Authors like RR Knudson offered not an alternative to the masculinist myth, but a co-optation of it for the singularly exceptional female athlete. Knudson's all-conquering heroine is an iteration of the masculine performance storyline with a postfeminist twist; that a singularly talented girl can rise through the ranks of the men's league through grit and determination. Levin, Oriard posits, offers an alternative to the masculinist performance and considers sport not just as a way to "dominate nor to be dominated, but to be in one's body in the world" (18). What Sandoz pinpoints about "Raymond's Run" is the mutual respect and recognition by the girls of each other, not only as competitors, but also as *real people*, not just "flowers or fairies or strawberries" or whatever else society wishes to see them as (Sandoz 57).

More attention has been paid by scholars to juvenile or "girls'" literature than representation of adult athletes in fiction, particularly in recent decades. This is likely because adolescence is a formative time for developing one's schemas regarding gender roles, as well as one's own identity, and therefore seen by scholars as a particularly crucial period. This concern of scholars regarding the representation and often stereotyping of girls and young women athletes speaks to literature as a resource for helping build one's understanding of lived experience. Kitrina Douglas and David Carless, the sport psychologists behind the term "performance narrative" (performance storyline) claim that "public portrayals" such as TV

coverage, athlete interviews, autobiographies, documentaries, newspaper and magazine articles, etc, are ways that we are socialised into "what it is to *be* a sportsperson…what is "normal" when it comes to sport" (7).[9] Researchers' focus on adolescent literary representation of female athletes suggests that they would add fiction to this list of "public portrayals," even if fiction, by definition, is not inherently based in fact. Fictive discourse (including, but not limited to, generic fiction) is not a "means for constructing scenarios that are cut off from the actual world, but rather a means for negotiating *with* that world"—even if they are not inherently realistic texts (Phelan et al 63). Fiction is a thought-experiment that allows readers to mediate their engagement with represented "truths" or schemas of the fictional world relevant to their own life. I agree that fiction matters as a public portrayal of sporting identities but argue that the importance of thinking critically about representation of sportswomen does not wane after readership passes a certain age.

Surveying girls literature from the 70-90s, Kane found that fictional representations of girl athletes constituted a "fictional *denial* of sport as a site of resistance and empowerment for athletic females" (231, emphasis mine). That is, that fiction as a public portrayal of athletic identity most often offered girls the model that "sporting female protagonists [were] going against their 'true nature'" and that "novels featuring women's team sports undermined female solidarity by equating it with heterosexual desire" (231). Dawn Heinecken found that the texts of the 2007-2012 *Pretty Tough* series, while departing from some stereotypical ways of framing girl athletes, ultimately are "undercut by postfeminist framings that render athleticism a positive

[9] I use the term performance storyline when referring to the masterplot within sporting narrative habitus, which can also be considered a "script" within sporting schemas. Both Theory of Mind (ToM) psychologists/literary theorists and cultural sport psychologists utilise a theatrical analogy, the former referring to schemas as "scripts" and the latter noting individuals who modify their story and behaviour to "play the part of athlete" or "live the part of athlete" (Carless and Douglas 704, 2013). My preference for the term performance storyline over performance narrative seeks to acknowledge the differentiation between "story" and "narrative," in the literary field, despite their conflation in sport psychology.

identity limited to privileged groups while failing to challenge masculine sports hegemony" (24). As the name suggests, the *Pretty Tough* series suggests that it is important to be tough, but also pretty. Similarly, Glenn and Watkins (2020) as well as Whiteside et al (2013) found an emphasis on postfeminist discourse in YA literature—in particular a focus "girl power" that "obscures the way in which a gendered hierarchy in sports—which provides the logic for the disenfranchisement of female athletes, is left intact" (319). This "allure of individualistic ideology functions in a way that can be detrimental to building a consciousness among young women toward ongoing systemic inequities" (Whiteside 418). In response, Heinecken calls for fictional representation of some of the many real challenges that women in sport face, including racism, classism, homophobia, the Female Athlete Triad (now called RED-S), sexual harassment/abuse, devaluation of skills, and limited access/resources.

This established research on the emphasized heterosexuality, femininity or postfeminist can-do-ness of girls literature in the 70s-90s is significant, as it stands in opposition to my findings regarding women's running literature of the same time period (and extending into the 2010s). I find that adult women's running literature *is* a site of resistance against sexism and other issues within sport, and I prove this through close-readings that "attend to the social dimension of literary form" by focusing on how the thematic and formal attributes of a text are in conversation with historically-situated cultural and political tensions expressed in each text (Moya 10). Of all the media forms that I cover in this dissertation, the fictional texts *do* the most work to address real challenges within women's distance running (as Heinecken calls for) and engage the least with postfeminist rhetoric and ideology, as compared to their close sibling memoir, as well as farther relatives of advertisement and social media.

My analysis, in many ways, picks up where Sandoz left off, with "Raymond's Run" serving as my earliest text. Rather than generally "avoiding direct confrontation with gender arrangements prevailing in society at large," as Sandoz found of early women's sport fiction, I argue that post 1970s running fiction directly confronts gender arrangements as well as intersecting positionalities such as race, sexuality, and ability. Qualities such as "temporalities, storyworlds, mind representations, or acts of narration that audiences would construe as physically, logically, or psychologically impossible or implausible in real-world storytelling situations" can engage readers in thought experimentation to aid them in negotiating schemas of gender, race, sexuality and ability, and with these texts, their intersection with sporting schemas of running, specifically the masculinist performance storyline (Nielsen, Phelan, Walsh 63).

Fiction depicting women's running post-1970 draws attention to gendered oppression within the sport, rejecting the masculinist masterplot of performance in favour of consideration of intersecting subjectivities. In the texts that I am highlighting, certain ideas about what *running is, could, or can be*, are articulated that are different from the worlds created in fiction that follows a masculinist performance plot.

I am not asserting that women's fiction about running represents a truer or "better" version than that articulated by male authors. But like Sandoz, I "want to recognize that often (not always) the multiple realities women write present sportswomen *differently*. This is the case even in fiction utilising the form of sport historically most objectionable when pursued by women: athletics at once institutionalised, competitive, and public" (33). The texts under analysis in this chapter feature running in various manifestations and forms, and feature characters with different attitudes and perspectives regarding what running means to them. While some are competition and achievement-focused, others are internally so. Some run purely for

recreation, others follow intense training regimens. Some race to compete with others, some race to beat themselves, some race to run in community and some don't race at all! This itself is a marked difference from masculinist running literature itself, which almost exclusively focuses on intense competition.

Materials & Methodology:

In this chapter I analyse four short stories and one novel, written between 1971-2018. These texts are authored by women and feature women running. While *Postfeminism & the extra mile* is, as a whole, focused on competitive running, this first chapter opens its boundaries beyond solely the competitive context, due to the shortage of literary depictions of explicitly competitive women runners. This absence itself signals a differentiation in gendered discourse; men are much more likely to be written as competitors, while textual production targeted at women has largely emphasised running as a weight-loss, fitness, and self-actualization activity (Jutel 2009).

I will provide a brief summary of the texts. In Bambara's short story "Raymond's Run" (1971), protagonist Squeaky is certainly competitive; she takes her identity as a runner and her performance at the 50-yard dash at the local May Day celebration seriously. Maitland's short story "The Loveliness of the Long Distance Runner" (1983) is an intertextual reference to Alan Sillitoe's popular 1959 story, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner." Sillitoe's story features a young protagonist "sticking it to the man" by throwing a race that he is expected to win, while Maitland's story features the alternating perspectives of a lesbian couple Jane (who is running a marathon), and Sally (who is disapproving of such an endeavour). Jane is also framed as capable and competitive. Oates' seven page, but two sentence long short story "Running" (1992) features a runner in a non-competitive setting, a woman out for a trail run with her

partner. She pulls ahead of her male partner on the trail, only to come across a group of men she feels threatened by. Enduring several minutes of panic, her partner catches up to her and the couple pass the group of men without event. "Running" is a story of what *could* happen, what one must be wary of, when running alone as a woman. Levins' short story "Her Marathon" (1992) is another story of a lesbian couple, featuring protagonist Celía who undergoes a physical and spiritual transition as she trains to participate in her first race. Jaclyn Gilbert's novel *Late Air* (2018) features contemporary collegiate running. This text portrays women's running perhaps at its most "institutionalised, competitive, and public," utilising alternating focalization of Murray, the coach of the Yale cross-country team, and his wife, Nancy. The team's injury rate, the rampant disordered eating behaviours, and the sexist culture of women's collegiate sport are depicted through a man within, and a woman without, that community.

My theoretical approach to this chapter is influenced by my previous work arguing for the productivity of placing literary narrative theory and sport and exercise studies narrative theory into conversation. On the literary side, I am influenced by Paula Moya's call for a socioformal approach to literature, and James Phelan's rhetorical approach to fictionality. On the sport and exercise studies side, I am indebted to Carless and Douglas' scholarship on the performance narrative.

In her text *The Social Imperative*, Moya outlines the research questions underlying her book in what she humorously refers to as "anxious" and "non-anxious" versions. She asks: "What is the power of a work of literature to affect a reader's perception of his or her world?" (anxious version: "does literature still matter?) (6). Sport literature certainly has the ability to impact a reader's perception of the sporting world–running's literary history is proof in point. Moya's second question that I wish to highlight is: "How might a nuanced and insightful

interpretation of a given text affect our perception of that text–and by extension of the world it represents? (the anxious version: "do literary critics still matter?) (6). My goal in this chapter is to offer what I hope you will find to be nuanced and insightful interpretations of texts within women's running's literary lineage, with the goal of enhancing your perception of these texts and the worlds they represent, and by extension, that world's connection to particular sociocultural contexts.

Texts, of course, impact people differently, as my reaction to *Once a Runner* demonstrates. The "key to the impact that a text will have on a reader is the manner and extent to which *that* text activates for *that* reader a set of cognitive-affective structures social psychologists refer to as schemas" (11). Schemas are the ways that we organise our past experiences and use them to react to immediate experiences, they serve as patterns, as scripts for future behaviours. Schemas are self-relevant, learned, and most often shared with those within similar demographic cohorts–for example, racial, gender, class cohorts will often share schemas; "schemas are necessarily shaped by those facets of a person's Being that hold sociocultural experiential significance for her or others in the social and historical context in which she lives" (Moya 18).

So why do schemas matter to fiction? Schemas are useful in considering why/how literature affects us, because literature itself is a "system of social communication through which information, ideas, and norms are transmitted from author to reader and among different communities of readers" (21). From a methodological perspective, this means 1) considering the schemas that readers bring along with them to their interaction with a text, and; 2) paying attention to the ways that particular schemas are "embedded into a work of literature through the use of narrative features" (24). My reading of *Once a Runner* was different from that of many of

my male friends within the running community, because I brought my own schemas to it regarding both gender and sport–the combination of the two resulted in my particular frustration regarding the way women were represented in the texts.

I focus my close-readings on how schemas are built into the texts themselves through narrative features. In particular, I look at how these texts scaffold their characters' understandings of gender, race, sexuality, and ability and their intersection with the sport of running. How do these characters organise their experiences and through what narrative techniques is this depicted?

Literature has the potential to alter readerly schemas (Moya 35). In these women's running texts, I think there is a call to readers to question the masculinist performance storyline, which is itself a sporting schema.

Theme: Relationality

In contrast to texts that follow the performance storyline (that is most sporting media across genres) and have embedded within them schemas that support the performance narrative habitus, such as emphasising rugged individualism and the pursuit of the solo athlete, these female-authored/female-focused running texts offer a vision of running as intensely relational.

Moya writes that:

> "by representing the interconnected lives of different characters that are all negotiating multiple and overlapping structures of power and privilege, a good work of literature can suggest to its readers how race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality constrain and enable characters' behaviours and ideologies. In this way, some works of literature allow a reader to perceive (or a literary critic to analyse) the way race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality actually *matter*–both in the sense of being important and meaningful and in the sense of becoming materialised in individual lives" (36)

In these texts, running is not solely mobilised as a space of individual identity, but also a way to mediate one's consideration of the self in connection with others, and within structures of race,

gender, sexuality, and ability. Relationships and relationality, rather than individual heroes, star in women's running literature.

In Bambara's short story, protagonist Squeaky has two epiphanic moments, both regarding her relationality to others. The first occurs while she is racing the 50-yard dash and looks over to see:

> ...on the other side of the fence is Raymond with his arms down to his side and the palms tucked up behind him, running in his very own style, and it's the first time I ever saw that and I almost stop to watch my brother Raymond on his very first run (137)

Raymond is Squeaky's older brother, for whom she frequently serves as a caretaker, as he has an undisclosed disability. In the story, the first person focalization through Squeaky is the only way that readers experience Raymond. While Squeaky is fiercely protective of Raymond, until seeing him run alongside her she does not think of him having his own pursuits, like she does with her running. Watching her brother have this experience with running that is his own, complete with his "very own style" becomes even more important than winning to Squeaky, when winning was all she was focused on previously. In this moment readers have access to Squeaky's focalized reorganisation of her understanding of Raymond's access and ability, which they must navigate in connection with their own schemas for understanding (dis)ability that they bring to the site of reading.

The fact that the story is titled "Raymond's Run" and not "Squeaky's Run" underlines that this is an epiphanic moment for Squeaky. But, Raymond's run also occurs in the context of his enthusiasm for seeing his sister race. After seeing Raymond run, Squeaky thinks that maybe she could explore other pursuits herself, like piano, and coach Raymond to be a "champion runner" (183). She thinks: "I've got a roomful of ribbons and medals and awards. But what has Raymond got to call his own?" Squeaky begins thinking about how perhaps she might support

Raymond in having something to "call his own," to be proud of, to focus on, without sacrificing having her own interests to cultivate.

The story is written through Squeaky's perspective as a young Black girl. Her worldview, in which she can easily picture herself "retir[ing] as a runner" to instead "begin a whole new career as coach with Raymond as my champion" is an important alternative to the reality of sport when the story was published (138). With Title IX not passed yet, formal collegiate athletics would not be available to Squeaky, and as a young Black girl she would face even further barriers to participation. Likewise, were Raymond to pursue athletics as a person with a disability, he would face fewer opportunities to participate. Yet, the ease with which Squeaky can picture this reality—Raymond as a champion, and Squeaky herself in a position of athletic authority—highlights the unfathomability of such discrimination to a child's mind, and consequentially the unacceptability of it as a (continued) reality. Literature is a mode of communication that requires imagination by author and reader. In this instance, Squeaky's imagining, as a fictional character, of what the world *could* look like, begs the reader to consider how the "social order can be imaginatively examined and reshaped"—and also how fictional imaginings interact with extratextual sociocultural context. Through Squeaky's focalization, Bambara represents the overlapping structures of power and privilege regarding race, gender, and ability.

Racing also brings Squeaky into relation with other girl athletes. Earlier in the story, interactions between Squeaky and other girls are tense and combative, with Squeaky feeling the need to assert her superiority. In response, "Gretchen smiles, but it's not a smile, and I'm thinking that girls never really smile at each other because they don't know how and don't want to know how and there's probably no one to teach us because grown-up girls don't know either"

(134). When Squeaky observes Gretchen's smile as not a real smile, Bambara communicates Squeaky's underlying gendered schemas–her ways of organising the world that influence her response to a particular interaction–that include perhaps an expectation of women and girls to behave a certain way, to "smile and be silent," or to view each other as competition, not in an athletic sense, but a social one. Squeaky's musing that women don't know how to really smile at each other either, and that this is the reason that girls don't know how to, suggests in Squeaky's experience, societal gender norms limit the relationality between women. Squeaky consistently butts up against gender norms and expectations placed on girls that prevent them from being fully themselves, and as one can see in this passage, from being able to fully connect with each other in authentic ways.

It is through taking athletic competition seriously that Gretchen and Squeaky are able to form a connection, depicting competition not just as a space for "dominating" others, but rather a space for mutual respect to be cultivated. It is when Gretchen is going through her post-race routine, clearly having taken the race very seriously, that Squeaky "sort of like[s] her for the first time" (130). Squeaky can respect Gretchen for the way she comports herself during the race. Gretchen, in return "nods to congratulate me and then she smiles. We stand there with this big smile of respect between us. It's about as real a smile as girls can do for each other" (139). Competing together and giving each other respect for one's dedication changes the relationship between the girls. This is pointedly contrasted in the way that Squeaky perceives Gretchen's smile differently post-race. In contrast to the performance storyline, who wins is not the most important part of the story.

Written in alternating first person perspectives between romantic partners Sally and Jane, the literal form of Maitland's "The Loveliness of the Long-Distance Runner" compels

consideration of their relationship, mediated through running. Sally doesn't understand why Jane feels the need to compete in races and resents the time and focus Jane spends on running. Part of the reason that Sally resents Jane's running is because she sees it as at odds with their feminist values: "Marathon running is a goddamn competitive, sexist, lousy thing to do" (87). Therefore, not only does the formal structure of the text emphasise the relationship between the women, the point of conflict in the story is also about the relationality of running, with Sally being disdainful of competition, rugged individualism and elements of toxic masculinity that are frequently associated with the masculinist performance narrative habitus, and Jane trying to explain to Sally (and evidenced through her racing experience depicted) that running can alternatively serve as a space of community, support, and solidarity. Jane frames racing as akin to a feminist activity:

> Call it sisterhood. You can't do it alone. You need…" And I [Sally] interrupt and say, "You need the competition you; you need people to beat. Can't you see." And she says, "You're wrong...You'll just have to believe me: you need the other runners and mostly they need you and want you to finish. And the crowd wants you to finish, they say. I want to experience that solidarity, of other people wanting you to do what you want to do (90)

To Jane, running is less about beating other people and more about the experience of being in community and solidarity with other runners, as each works toward their goals. Choosing the word "sisterhood," even to describe a co-ed race, rejects the premise of athletics as solely a sphere of masculine "brotherhood."

Social psychologists have found that reading fiction improves one's theory of mind (ToM), which is the "ability to attribute mental states to others as well as oneself, such that one understands that others might have beliefs, desires, and intentions that are different from one's own" (14). David Kidd argues this to be the case because "literary fictions typically highlight human subjectivity and the existence of multiple perspectives while also requiring readers to integrate several streams of information at once" (14). In "Loveliness" the reader has access to

the contradictory attitudes towards running of Jane and Sally through the focalized representation of their thoughts.

At the beginning of the story Sally occupies the role of the detracting girlfriend who "just doesn't get it," a figure seen over and over in male-authored, male-focused sport literature. However, unlike the (heteronormative) girlfriend/wife characters frequently represented in masculinist performance storyline-oriented texts, Maitland crafts "Loveliness" with equal weight to perspectives of Jane (the runner) and Sally (the non-runner). The reader must navigate both the women's attitudes towards Jane's participation, as well as their love for one another, requiring the consideration of how gendered stereotypes ("the detracting girlfriend" and "the dedicated athlete") interact with sexual norms and queer love.

At the conclusion of "Loveliness" Sally does, in fact, show up to support Jane at the finish line, literally and figuratively. The values that running represents in "Loveliness" are made explicit by Maitland, but they differ from those set out by Oriard when he says that sports are a metaphor for American values. Jane thinks during the race, "perseverance, endurance, patience and accepting love are part of running a marathon" (93). These words are then echoed again from Sally's focalization: "Endurance, perseverance, love;" indicating that in listening to Jane, Sally has been able to reorient her conceptualization of her lover's participation in running away from a solely masculinist performance schema, and perhaps is willing to try on Jane's perspective of running as a feminist act (94). Rather than a metaphor for the American Dream and stoic individualism, marathoning is figured as a metaphor for relationship.

The final line of the story is Jane's recollection of Sally saying, "Rejoice, we conquer" (94). The phrase is an allusion to that supposedly uttered by Pheidippides, but in this sense, it is also a reference to overcoming the conflict over running in their relationship, and Sally

understanding why it is important to Jane. Published in 1980, Maitland embeds in "Loveliness" schemas for understanding Jane and Sally's lesbian relationship as committed and loving decades before the American legalization of gay marriage.

Levin's "Her Marathon," like "Loveliness," also features a lesbian couple and was published prior to the legalization of gay marriage in the US. The protagonist Celía is initially drawn to try out running by witnessing the communal experience of watching the New York City marathon, in which "more runners came by, more and more, thousands, until it seemed that they filled the whole city, and that all of us, were running" (43). Despite having no direct relationship to anyone running, Celía finds herself losing her voice cheering for hours, seemingly very much a part of the type of crowd that Jane describes as "wanting you to finish." In Levin's story, the experience of watching the NYC marathon inspires Celía to train for her own race. Though her training is a solo activity, it alters her relationship to her body and mind, as well as transforms her relationships with her partner Needa, and their son.

Alberto Salazar is a ghostly figure throughout the short story, leading and winning the NYC marathon that inspired Celía and appearing in her thoughts and dreams.[10] [11] In one such dream, Celía and Salazar are running together; he tells her that "everyone has a power. Use it for running. Use it for loving. Use it for God" (50). When Celía wakes up, her partner Needa is sobbing that she feels lost in her life. Celía, thinking of her dream, calls upon her power–for loving as well as running.

[10] Salazar did win the 1980, 81 and 82 editions of the New York City Marathon.

[11] In 2019, Salazar received a doping ban from the United States Anti-Doping Agency. He appealed the ban at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which upheld the ban in 2021. Also in 2021, the United States Center for SafeSport deemed Salazar permanently ineligible for coaching duties due to both emotional and sexual misconduct towards runners he coached. Levin's short story was published decades before these events, and the favourable depiction of Salazar should be read accordingly.

Utilising a dream sequence is a fictional device that allows Levin to place Celía, an everyperson runner, into relation with Salazar, a decorated professional runner. More interestingly though, Levin uses Salazar, an athlete that by all accounts was (and remains) obsessed with winning at any cost, and deeply embedded in performance schemas, as the vehicle for Celía and consequently readers to contemplate the power of the individual as something not solely directed towards running and winning, but for loving.

In *Late Air*, like "Loveliness," relationality is emphasised through both form and content. Written in alternating focalization between Murray and Nancy, who are married and then divorced, one is forced to grapple with their relationship, but also Murray's relationship to the athletes on the collegiate cross-country team he coaches, and the way that he fails to understand the relationships the women on the team have with each other.

Murray subscribes to the masculine performance narrative habitus. He sees running as an individualistic pursuit and winning as something to be attained at any cost. This perspective renders him unable to see his runners as whole people rather than solely athletes and causes him to frequently try to deny the team members' care for each other as more than athletes. And yet the novel also contextualises Murray's behaviour towards the runners by offering glimpses of his relationship with his own father, and how his relationship with his athletes is a site where he projects the trauma of the death of his infant daughter.

By giving the reader a sense of how Murray developed his performance schemas, Gilbert illustrates the generationality of sporting schemas. Murray's relationship with his father and coach lead him to conflate care and performance valuation with his own athletes. For example: "the others needed results before they earned their privileges. He would never have dared expect his father to give him the ten cents he and Patrick got for weekly chores; they'd had to wait for

their father to bequeath his generosity unexpectedly. The point had been *not to expect anything*—it was the same for an athlete—you worked and worked, harder and harder, until fate smiles upon you" (127). The italicised epithets that appear throughout the text are attitudes that circulate in athletics—they hail those who identify as athletes. This requires receivers to negotiate how these athletic ideas that are part of the performance narrative habitus are working to empower or disempower, and whether they are appropriate. In this instance, the "privilege" being discussed is the opportunity to visit their injured teammate in the hospital, leaving the reader likely uncomfortable with the idea of this being a "privilege" that is "earned," or a decision that is left up to the coach at all.

Late Air is also a complete rejection of the figure of the guru-coach that is often found in tandem with the athlete-hero of masculine sport literature. In fact, most of Murray's problems in the novel are presented as stemming from the sexist performance narrative habitus that is so frequently celebrated in male sport literature.

Running is hugely relational for Nancy, who takes it up after her divorce with Murray. Not only does she begin running in community, running helps her feel more connected to both Murray and their deceased daughter. Nancy begins to understand that Murray's own runs after Jean's death may have served as his space for grieving their daughter, as running begins to serve as a way for her to process her own grief. Sometimes, while running, but only when she does not expect it, she is able to see Jean running with her–"happy, free, unweighted by circumstances, the brevity of her life" (285). When Nancy is in a state of flow while running, a state that is usually thought of as an intense connection with one's own bodymind, she instead experiences intense relationality with her deceased daughter. The depiction of Nancy's relationship to

running offers an alternative understanding of what physical activity can mean beyond "fitness" and competition.

The denouement of the novel is the Yale team's rejection of competition in favour of relationality, with the athletes literally "locked together, in a barricade," chanting the name of their injured teammate, prioritising their relationship with Becky over racing (Gilbert 281). The Yale athletes' communal refusal to engage any further with a "win-at-all-costs" culture, which the reader experiences only through Murray's perspective (it sends him reeling), compels readers to try and "put themselves in the shoes" of those athletes and consider their perspectives.

Each of these texts create worlds where running is able to serve as a space of connection and relationship. In fact, relationship is depicted as foundational to the sport. Even when running is an individual activity and is pursued in a competitive environment, these texts emphasise connection and respect rather than domination or dismissal.

Theme: (The Runner's) Identity

In masculine sport literature there is often ableist gatekeeping about who is "allowed" to identify as an athlete, as a runner, through the worlds the texts create. This is particularly clear in the first lines of *Once A Runner*, in which the "night joggers" are clearly configured as separate from Quenton as "an athlete." In each of the woman-authored texts, the protagonist's sense of identity as a runner is a key part of each story. In each of them, the schemas for the "runner identity" is not connected to being able to train at a specific pace, or the ability to beat others, but rather an intrinsic motivation to run and a delight in the embodied experience of running.

In "Loveliness" and "Running" the connection between running, identity, and embodiment is made clear through the thoughts of the running women. Jane thinks, "*I like running. Like me running. Space and good feeling*" (88). Like all of her stream-of-consciousness

style observations while running, Jane's thoughts are staccato musings with each footfall captured by Maitland's deliberately short sentences. In this case, Jane moves naturally from idea to idea—she likes the activity of running, she likes her sense of self while running, and she likes the embodied experience of running. Similarly, Oates' protagonist thinks while running, "*This is happiness!—my truest self*" (245). While Oates' story isn't written entirely in stream of consciousness the way that Maitland's is, she made the decision to represent this claim of identity, of the protagonist's sense of being her "truest self" through her own italicised thoughts. In both stories, running is an activity through which these women know themselves.

In "Running," the idea that being a runner has little to do with athletic prowess is further emphasised as both the woman and her partner are framed as "not serious or obsessive runners, not marathon runners, neither in fact had been athletic or much interested in competitive sports in adolescence" (245). This framing, right before the protagonist claims to be her truest self while running, rejects the notion that one must be "serious" or a "marathoner" in order for running to have a profound impact on sense of identity.

Celía's description of feeling the "fat bobbling around [her] stomach and arms and hips and thighs" is a parallel description to the women *Once A Runner*'s protagonist Quenton emphatically defines as *not* runners. Yet, throughout "Her Marathon" running helps Celía feel something that is "real," that is, "the sure, undying knowledge of the body that can run and love, give birth, sob, suffer" (55). Once again, it is not one's speed or physique that is emphasised as part of the running identity, but rather self-knowledge and an embrace of the embodied experience of running.

In each of these stories, the embodied joy and intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation to run is a key element of the "runner identity." Running is also figured as a way to meditate upon

other identities that one may claim or have pressed upon them. For Squeaky, claiming her identity as a runner is not just connected to embodied joy, but is also a way of rejecting gender norms being foisted upon her. Squeaky is clear; she is done being told that she must do "girly things," asserting "I am not a strawberry. I do not dance on my toes. I run. That is what I am all about" (135). For Squeaky, who is also the youngest depicted protagonist, running is a way to take up space, to assert herself on her own terms. For the unnamed protagonist in "Running," being on the trail compels her to think about her identity in duality: "especially when she was running she felt angry contempt for that other woman, that sick woman that coward who was, yet was not, herself, for she was a wholly free agency" (248). In this passage, the protagonist is meditating on her relationship to "the man who is not her husband" and how other facets of her identity relate to him. It is while running that she feels "contempt" for the version of herself that cares whether or not they are married, or cares about her mother's disapproval of their unmarried status. It is while running that she wishes to lean into her identity as an independent and successful woman who would perhaps like to take Squeaky's words and twist them to say "*He is not* what I am all about."

In *Late Air* we see how the "runner's identity" in the vein put forth by Quenton Cassidy, that is reliant on masculinist performance ideology, is relationally detrimental. It becomes clear throughout the novel that Murray tried desperately to please his father through his running and through his subscription to a masculinist win-at-all-costs mindset. Consequently, Murray sees it as appropriate for his athletes to locate their motivation to run extrinsically, in pleasing him, rather than intrinsically, to please themselves.

The Yale women runners are peripheral characters in *Late Air*, we only know them through Murray and Nancy. And yet viewing these young women through these two very

different perspectives tells us a lot, indirectly, about the danger of the pressure of one's entire identity being invested in "a runner," and when one begins to feel their value as a person is associated with how well one can compete. After Becky, the team's star athlete, is injured in an accident, Murray begins to consider retroactively her behaviour before the accident, noting that "with each major accomplishment she'd only grown quieter, more cautious. The little bits of food she ate—he didn't know when that had started either—but it was like she'd been trying to disappear rather than fill a room, as she should have wanted to, to *seize* the space that was required of a champion" (66). Murray organises his worldview through the understanding that it is *winning* that will make Becky feel like she can take up space, that she is seen, but as *Late Air* ultimately demonstrates, along with the short stories discussed in this chapter, is that this feeling is much more healthfully accessed through finding joy in one's internal validation of the self and through the cultivation of relationships that support one as a whole person. The non-linear temporality of fiction, in which a reader may observe the accident, the aftermath, and then Murray's re-organization of pre-accident experiences based on his realisations post-accident, allows for the reader not only to witness Murray's questioning of his performance schemas with regard to sport, but also for the reader to potentially question their own schemas regarding performance.

Becky's disordered eating behaviours—and likely those of many of Murray's past and present athletes as alluded to throughout the novel, through both Murray's retrospective consideration, or Nancy's overt concerns—are a stress response to the pressure to "be a runner." The tying of self-identity to performance (a cornerstone of the performance storyline), and particularly when it is attempted to be achieved through weight loss, is intensely detrimental to athlete physical and mental health. As Heinecken argued, real issues like RED-S should be

addressed in sport fiction to assert that issues like disordered eating, bone loss, amenorrhea—as well as others like chronic pain, sexual harassment, devaluation of ability—are *not* just part of what it means to be female athlete. I do not interpret this as a demand for fiction to depict solely "real life"–that is, of course, not what fiction is or does. Rather, I think that Heinecken's point is best understood from a socioformal perspective–that fiction is an important space for us to think (or re-think) about how schemas of gender, race, sexuality, and ability are embedded within sporting cultures.

Women's running texts offer an inclusive rather than exclusive framing of what it means to identify as a runner. What makes one a runner is not speed or accomplishments (though those are not presented as unimportant or unfulfilling), nor is the runner's identity exclusive to those of a certain weight, age, race, class, or ability. In particular, in *Late Air* Gilbert offers a critique of the exclusionary "runner's identity" that is supported by a performance schema/narrative habitus, demonstrating the damage that such a sense of self has wreaked upon both Murray and members of the Yale team.

Theme: Gender roles

In each of these texts, the authors craft characters with an awareness of how when they show up as runners, they also show up with their other identities, including gender, race, and sexuality, the intersection of which impacts how they experience running spaces. In particular, all of the characters navigate running in environments in which patriarchal culture others them.

Bambara opens "Raymond's Run" with an immediate meditation on gender roles, as the first line reads: "I don't have much work to do around the house like some girls" (131). Squeaky is excused from the explicitly feminised labour of housework because of her role as Raymond's caretaker. Though Squeaky is excused from this "girl" activity, she chooses to reject other

explicitly feminised activities. Even though May Pole dancing is the event that most girls participate in, Squeaky prefers the footraces. Her mother, however, "thinks it's a shame I don't take part and act like a girl for a change" (134). Through Squeaky's focalization, Bambara illustrates Squeaky's navigation of gendered schemas, by having her identify elements of gender as performative, as a way one "acts" rather than simply "is."

> You'd think she'd be glad her daughter ain't out there prancing around a May Pole getting the new clothes all dirty and sweaty trying to act like a fairy or a flower or whatever you're supposed to be when you should be trying to be yourself, whatever that is, which is, as far as I am concerned, a poor Black girl who can't really afford to buy shoes and a new dress you only wear once in a lifetime cause it won't fit next year 135

Like her previous assertion, "I am not a strawberry," Squeaky is openly disdainful of the infantilizing identity options seemingly put forth for young girls, to prance around "trying to act like a fairy or a flower or whatever." Again there is the word "act"—that young women are supposed to assume certain roles. Instead of trying to "act" certain ways, Squeaky thinks they "should be trying to be [themselves]." It is also clear in this passage that it is not solely gender norms at play during the May Day festivities. Through her focalization, Bambara crafts Squeaky as acutely aware that her racial identity and family's economic status play a role in her rejection of the performance of girliness. Bambara shows that Squeaky's understanding of herself involves awareness of how her intersecting gender, racial, and class identities shape her experience of different spaces, including the May Day events and sporting competition.

In "Loveliness," Maitland shows how Jane is aware of herself as a queer woman in a masculinist performance environment of the marathon. Jane wishes she hadn't worn her t-shirt that says "I am a feminist jogger" on it because it "Turns people on [...]. Men. Not on to me but on to beating me" (88). The t-shirt declaring her a feminist jogger seems to activate even more the fear men have of being beaten by a woman. Utilizing fiction's affordance of non-linearity,

Maitland shows us Jane's recollecting of an incident of sexual harassment at a previous race, "when there was a jock; a real pig: he kept passing us, dawdling, letting us pass him, passing again. And every time these remarks—the vaseline stains from our nipples or women getting him too turned on to run" (89). Not only does the flexibility in time representation underline the repetition of gender bias and how races are often first and foremost figured as a masculine space, one that is particularly threatened by women running quickly, but also help to understand how Jane's past experiences help her to organise her understanding of her current racing experience. Even though in the previous race Jane ended up beating the jerk, her musing on this past experience influence the present one. Jane exerted herself to beat the harasser at the previous race, and afterwards she "felt bad mentally. Playing those games" (89). Jane's number one rule is "run for yourself," so ultimately falling into a masculinist ideology that performance dominance equals superiority does not feel good to her, even if she did it to prove a point to a sexist man.

Oates' "Running" centres upon a different kind of relationality, one based on fear and gender power-dynamics rather than friendship or romance. Having left her male significant other behind, the protagonist is running alone when a group of men blocks her way. The runner sees "that they were staring with an unmistakable excitement, conferring together, one of them, thick-bodied, squat, his bare torso covered in coarse black hair, had already stepped quickly out onto the road as if to block her way, how very quickly he had moved, by instinct perhaps, sheer masculine instinct, the predator's instinct" (250). Oates' protagonist immediately associates this predatory behaviour as intrinsically masculine. In the repetition of "instinct" the protagonist is trying to make sense of the behaviour of the men. The repetition of "instinct" could either suggest that the men act this way unthinkingly, or that they knew *exactly* what they were doing. This ambiguity is aligned with the overall sense of the story— "nothing happened"—but the

protagonist's schemas for understanding the situation she found herself in strongly suggest something could have, had her male partner not intervened. Regardless of whether the men acted intentionally or not, the protagonist's description of the situation makes it clear that she felt like "prey." It doesn't matter whether the men intended to or not–they made her feel unsafe.

It is then the protagonist runner's relationship to her male partner that also seemingly prevents disaster:

> she saw how the expressions on the men's faces shifted, their eyes moving quicksilver in their sockets, their bodies too altering, almost imperceptibly, but unmistakable, they'd sighted something of someone behind her, in that instant she understood that the man who was not her husband and who did not love her with quite the hunger with which she loved him must have run into view...so everything was changed—*I'm safe—saved* (250).

Through the change in demeanour of the men on the trail when they sight the protagonist's male partner, Oates suggests that the power dynamics on the trail change when another man is present. The protagonist goes from "prey" to "property" in a sense–she is "safe" not because the environment is a safe one, but because of her relationship to another man. The italicised words, *"I'm safe–saved"* draw attention to the fact that a) safety for women is often a factor of proximity to a man, because b) other men are the source of the lack of safety in the first place. It is through no fault of her own that the protagonist is in an unsafe situation, yet she is the one that needs to be "saved."

In "Running" we are of course seeing the protagonist's experiences as a runner being impacted by misogynistic culture in that her safety is potentially at risk by the men on the trail. Even though "nothing happened," the fact that the protagonist is so hyper-aware of the potential of an attack speaks to her schemas for understanding society as that which within her personal safety is at risk from men.

The protagonist also uses her time on her run to reflect about other ways gender norms have impacted her life. She thinks about how she "had had an abortion once, and this was always to be a secret from him, as from her family" (247). While running and feeling like her "truest self" Oates' has her protagonist consider how her behaviour is constrained by social norms placed on her as a woman.

Sexist sport and broader culture are focal in *Late Air.* As Heinecken called for, in addition to the fictional representation of issues such as RED-S, *Late Air* also offers representation of the cultural devaluation of women's athletics. Murray perceives that Rick, the Athletic Director, "had always looked down on him for coaching girls in the first place. He'd once asked why he hadn't waited around for the men's cross-country coach to retire, but when Murray explained his belief that girls responded better to a male figure, Rick had laughed" (33). Murray is disdainful of Rick's sexist assumption that coaching men is the better job. But, his focalization follows it up with a subtler form of sexism in his assertion that women respond better to male coaching, a prominent stereotype that upholds the idea that proximity to masculinity is the way women achieve athletic success. Here we see Murray, an athletic authority figure supportive of women's sport, still engaging with underlying sexist stereotypes about gender roles.

To make sense of situations from his masculinist sport performance ideology perspective, Murray frequently attempts to cast his own wife into the role of female partner who is either "jealous of the time he spent coaching" or unable to understand running as "his field." And yet, since Nancy exists outside of the narrative habitus of the elite running community and is thus not as ensconced within a performance story mindset that allows for weight loss and loss of menstruation to be seen as "normal" and stress fractures as a price all competitive runners pay,

she actually sees the issues on Murray's team more clearly than he does. In these moments, in which Nancy would seemingly make better coaching decisions than Murray is himself, Gilbert flips the stereotype of the girlfriend/wife who "doesn't get it" on its head.

Gilbert also plays with the stereotype of the "jealous" significant other. Nancy views Murray's intense attention to athletes as potentially sexual in nature, even going as far as to suggest that he had an affair with Sarah. Nancy's focalizations reflect a cultural eroticization of sporting bodies and suspiciousness of close relationships between athletes and coaches, particularly between young women and older men. While Murray is outraged at Nancy's misreading of the situation, we see Murray make the same type of assumption about a fellow coach, that he must be having an affair with his younger female assistant coach. By presenting Nancy as constantly suspicious of Murray's relationships with his athletes, and yet Murray equally presumptive of a sexual relationship between a coach and assistant, readers are compelled to negotiate cultural assumptions about gender and sexual dynamics—what they consider appropriate and inappropriate. In this, Gilbert mediates the historically-situated cultural tensions of the #metoo movement, which has very much arrived in the sport of running, exposing incidences of sexual abuse and harassment across college campuses.

In the worlds created by the texts, characters must navigate the sport of running as a patriarchal space, even in non-competitive situations.

Theme: Bodies

As I previously noted, women's running fiction has tended to emphasise embodied joy as crucial to the "runner's identity" rather than the achievement of a certain speed or physique. Runners are frequently depicted as within what sport psychologists call the "flow state," a sense of absorption and focus on the task at hand that is the "gateway to optimal subjective experience"

(Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson). Crucially, the state of flow is not depicted only in connection to competitive contexts, as it most often is in performance storyline-oriented running fiction. However, even though women's running fiction emphasises embodied joy and intrinsic motivation as key to a running identity, cultural ideals of thinness and its ableist discursive entanglement with notions of "health" are still present.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, as the youngest protagonist at her tender age of ten, Bambara writes Squeaky as less entrenched in value judgments based on physical appearance than the other adult protagonists. She describes herself as "a little girl with skinny arms and a squeaky voice," but makes no direct connection between her physical appearance and the practice of running. However, Squeaky does describe a fellow girl she does not like, Rosie, as being "as fat as I am skinny and has a big mouth where Raymond is concerned and is too stupid to know that there is not a big deal of difference between herself and Raymond that she can't afford to throw stones" (133). Clearly meant to be a derogatory description of Rosie, fatness is insinuated to be undesirable, as is proximity to Raymond's intellectual disability. Thus, while Squeaky's "skinniness" is not directly connected to her running, it is still framed in contrast to an undesirable state of fatness, and that this is perhaps learned at a young age.

At the beginning of "Loveliness," Sally is making a list of all the things that she is not going to think about that day. Number five on the list is that her "lover has the most beautiful body in the world. Because she runs. I fell in love with her because she has the most beautiful body I had ever seen. What, when it comes down to it, is the difference between my devouring her as a sex object and her competitive running?" (86). Sally admits to falling in love with Jane first and foremost because of her body, and the way that her body looks has been shaped by her dedication to running. Sally also states that there is "nothing spare on her, just miles and miles of

tight, hard, thin muscle" and " I love the leanness of her, which is a gift from marathon training" (90). It is Jane's "runner's body"—a body type associated with slenderness and toned musculature—that Sally is attracted to, explicitly connecting a cultural ideal of slenderness as attractive with running as a sport.[12] Sally and Jane identify as both lesbians and feminists; Sally recognizes that it is perhaps hypocritical of her to accuse Jane of participating in competitive marathoning when it's, in her opinion, a "sexist, lousy thing to do," when she herself is sexualizing Jane's "runner's body."

And yet, while most sport literature is rigidly heterosexual, and often features the hypersexualization of women by men, "Loveliness" and "Her Marathon" engage the desire of queer women. Sally's eroticization of her consenting romantic partner's body feels very different from the situation that the protagonist of "Running" finds herself in, as she makes eye contact with the men on the trail. These men make her feel uncomfortable: "She saw his eyes, hot, derisive, hungry, in terror she was telling them, *I am not my body, I am more than a woman's body*" (250). The telepathic assertion, *I am not my body* is in particular tension with the protagonist's prior embodied enjoyment of the act of running. While running, she is enjoying being her body, but when placed in situation with these men, she desires to distance her "self" from her "body," which is what she assumes they want—just a body. Not only that, she assumes these men want an "attractive" body, and she seeks to reassure herself that "once they got a clear look at her they would lose interest in her" because "she did not consider herself an attractive

[12] The growth in idealisation of the "runner's body" is rooted in aesthetic values promoted within the sport since the "Running Boom" of the 70s. Andrea Abbas notes that running "promotes an embodiment of middle-classness that naturalises age and gender inequalities, whilst also individualising responsibility for them" (159). In other words, the running community/industry consistently affirms the older or female body as inferior, while also communicating that it is the responsibility of women and/or older runners to "fix" their bodies to align with the idealised slender, muscular body. The concept of the "runner's body" is now part of running's sport-specific discourse upholding the postfeminist performance narrative habitus.

woman" (250). Here we see the protagonist's enculturated belief that only certain bodies (and not hers) are desirable—though in this case, desirability is an added risk.

Part of the reason Celía takes up running is because when she accidentally spectates the NYC Marathon, she sees a community that she can picture herself a part of, including physically: "so many people, and not all of them fast, not all of them skinny. Some even looked like me" (44). When Celía begins training, she describes her "stomach and arms and hips and thighs, heavy and disgusting, bringing me a little closer to the ground each time the skin folds flopped up and down" (47). In this passage Levin communicates Celía's encultured fatphobia directed towards her own body, describing it as "disgusting."

Within "Her Marathon," Levin depicts how weight loss and exercise, and notions of "health" are entangled with cultural appeals to thinness and "attractiveness." One of the women at Celía's work tells her, after she has been running for a few months, "you are looking really terrific these days" (49). Celía herself notes that "Needa's belly fat was shrinking" and "I look at Needa and the kid and see how slender they are now, and healthy, how beautiful and handsome and slender" (52). In each case, a physical transformation, specifically weight loss, is celebrated as unquestionably a sign that one is better-looking and healthier. Through Celía's focalization, Levin captures the enculturated belief in the value of thinness that most women face.

And yet, once again, in a race environment, this time as a participant, Celía feels community in the bodily diversity of the runners: "Near me, all shapes. Like crazy soldiers in some war" (54). Even though runners may look different, they are engaged in collective activity. But during the race, Celía repeatedly calls herself "Clumsy. Fat. Slow," until she has her epiphany that "this—here—is real," which takes her focus off of critiquing her own body, and into a celebration of its capabilities, power, and capacity for both movement and feeling (55).

Celía's focalization throughout the race demonstrates the sport of running as a space with the potential to promote either joy or despair about bodies, depending on how an individual engages with the sport.

Though we are not privy to their focalization the bodies of the Yale runners, seen through the eyes of Murray and Nancy, are thematically important to interrogation of the "win-at-all-costs" culture at play in *Late Air*. It is the stressor of Becky's injury that causes Murray to reassess his attitude towards the bodies of the women on the team. Whereas previously he has dismissed injuries as "part of the package," viewed weight-loss positively, and was seemingly disengaged from the emotional trauma that injuries and disordered eating (and often their connectedness) may have caused his athletes. Becky's injury causes him to reassess previous interactions, such as the one he had with Sara, a star athlete years before Becky. Murray thinks about how, "No, he hadn't asked Sarah about her pain either. Instead, he went over his notes, highlighting the strength training she'd want to prioritise once she could do weight-bearing activities again. In the middle, she'd started crying. *My bones are weak,* she'd sobbed, gripping the tops of her thighs. *They ache so much*" (215). Murray, so invested in Sarah as an athlete, as "a body," he forgets to consider her as a person. The athletes are largely peripheral characters to Nancy and Murray, thus the italicization of Sarah's anguish stands out as a key moment of athlete experience. Sarah's literal bones are hurting her as a result of numerous stress fractures, a hallmark injury caused by RED-S and overtraining. While men's running fiction rarely addresses injury and almost always figures running as a way of strengthening/honing the body, Sarah's statements depict an unhealthy running culture as actually the source of injury itself–something that has resulted in pain in the very core of her body.

Countless injuries are references during the novel: “Mary Hannan’s torn hamstring in ‘97,” “Kim Degrise’s bulging disk in ‘98,” “the year of the stress fractures,” “anemia brought all their times down too” (124). Murray speaks casually and factually about these instances, demonstrating the perspective that is common in sport—a culture of accepting injury as inevitable. Particularly disturbing however, is how Murray does not seem to be connecting rampant injury to disordered eating practices and low-weight within runners, until after Becky’s injury. He reconsiders Becky's frailty post-injury, and how other women on the team are in similar shape: “Liu had lost ten pounds over the summer, cheeks hollowed out, limbs reduced to muscle and bone. Right now her BMI was at a 17, a half point less than Becky’s, but Becky’s situation was different in that Becky’s physical exam and blood work had come back healthy. Anything abnormal would have been mentioned in his monthly meetings with Owens, wouldn't it?” (124). The fictional situation of Murray and his athletes speaks to the experience of countless collegiate athletes. Increasingly these athletes, predominantly women, are speaking about damaging experiences in collegiate programs regarding weight and body image.[13]

Even as he seemingly sees Becky and Liu’s physical state with new eyes post-injury, potentially seeing their extreme thinness as cause for concern rather than a sign of dedication, Murray also still can’t extricate his thoughts from viewing weight-loss as positive and necessary. While supervising a practice, he observes that “Patricia was in a sorority and still had some summer weight to lose” (128). In this textual example, the reader is “hearing” Murray’s thoughts; he does not make this statement directly to Patricia. This causes the reader to

[13] While I was writing this chapter, six women athletes at my own institution, the University of Oregon (renowned for its track program and status within the running world as the birthplace of Nike), came forward to discuss the harm that the program’s “data driven” approach wreaked on their mental health. Athletes were compelled to undergo body fat percentage testing multiple times per year, and even told they would not compete unless their body fat was under a certain percentage. UO coach, Robert Johnson, was quoted stating that “Track is nothing but numbers. A good mathematician probably could be a good track coach” (Goe np). This is reminiscent of Murray’s attitude of the body as a clock. In both cases, the focus becomes on the body, “the athlete” and not the person.

contemplate how a warped body culture is both overtly and covertly embedded in running culture. Even if Murray doesn't say it to Patricia, he's still thinking it, and if he's thinking it then it is still influencing his coaching decisions.

In each of these texts, characters navigate their experience of the embodied joy of running through their schemas within the cultural context of fatphobia and sexualization of women's bodies that exists not only in sport, but in broader society.

Conclusions

Rather than sources of conflict for a male protagonist, spectators, bystanders, or cheerleaders, in women-authored, women-focused running literature of the past 50 year, female characters are multiplicitous, complex, entangled in their cultural moment and in kinship with others, all through their experiences of running and identity as runners. None of these women-authored works of running fiction follow the masculinist performance storyline. They do not tell you that if you work hard you will succeed, or that triumph over obstacles is inherent to sport. They do not present sport as intrinsically fair, nor do they represent winning as the pinnacle of experience. Rather, they answer Heinecken's call for representation of issues within and specific to sport. They present running as a space of relationality, the "runner's identity" as inclusive rather than exclusive and the joy of the sport as intrinsic rather than extrinsic. They all pay attention to the way the intersecting identities of women runners impact their experience in a sport that consistently others women.

Squeaky, Jane and Sally, Oates' unnamed narrator, Celía, Nancy and the Yale team members' experiences are as important as Quenton Cassidy's, if not more, as they prove that you may be once a runner, but are always twice a woman.

CHAPTER III:

WHAT WE (DON'T) TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT RUNNING: MEMOIRS OF "FAST GIRLS"

I sent them there, sent all of them.
They go for glory
and because I told them to,
knowing all the while
how fragile the bones,
how fixed ahead the eyes are,
forgetting to look down, forgetting
in the beauty of the run
that anything can end in a second
– Grace Butcher, "Do We Need an Ambulance for Cross-Country?"

Introduction

I opened the previous chapter with how I struggled with the depictions of women in running fiction when I was a teenager and that, in many ways, that nagging sensation was the germination for this project. I didn't start thinking about how memoirs are a powerful tool for interpellating us into a (postfeminist) performance narrative habitus until I was in my second or third year of university. And no, "interpellation into a performance narrative habitus" was not the phrasing I would have used then (those are ten dollar grad school words that I'm throwing around now!). But the idea remains the same–that memoirs present to us what a sporting life looks like, and what they include and what they exclude influences how the reader thinks about what a life in sport means, or "should" look like.

I experienced a significant and, at the time, "career-ending" injury when I was only twenty. As my torn hip-flexor refused to heal, and weeks turned into months turned into years of not being able to run without pain, and my "identity" as a runner felt stolen, I began to notice that there were no models for stories like mine. There was no fiction, no memoir, no newspaper article, barely even a social media post, about the athlete who doesn't get better, the person who doesn't "overcome." I read memoir after memoir of runners where major months-long injuries were written away in a sentence or two, while triumphant races got pages and pages of description. I was looking again for my experience, which at the time was frustration and isolation, and I wasn't finding it. Everything I read, watched, listened to seems to say that if I "tried hard enough," I'd be able to get back to where I was (or better!). And I felt, whether it was true or not, as though my teammates thought that I wasn't trying hard enough to get back, that I lacked the "willpower" or "mental fortitude" or all those other things we say are the most important thing in sport when we don't want to talk about luck and talent.

Disability studies scholar Simi Linton notes the similarities in rhetoric of "overcoming" that exists in both ableist and postfeminist contexts. So key to the sporting performance narrative habitus, rhetoric of overcoming embeds ideas of "personal triumph over a personal condition…when disabled people internalize the need to "overcome" rather than demand social change, they shoulder the same kind of exhausting and self-defeating "Super-Mom" burden that feminists have analyzed" (Linton 18). (For more on "Super-Moms!" see the next chapter.) In this chapter, I study the extent to which memoirs of distance runners participate in or resist narratives of "overcoming," in a cultural context that seems to demand athletes step into the role of Role Model™ and construct themselves as marketable athlete brands.

I named this chapter "What We (Don't) Talk About When We Talk About Running: Memoirs of 'fast girls.'" The title is an allusion to Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami's 2008 running memoir, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. In true literary fashion, Murakami's title is itself a literary allusion in reference to Raymond Carver's 1981 short story collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. It is certainly fitting that Murakami switched to singular pronouns for his title. His text is, in many ways, a celebration of introversion in the form of a training and work journal that has bonus musings about weight, ageing and his music taste. If there is one overarching takeaway from the text, it is that distance running is an apt metaphor for novel-writing. But truthfully, when I read *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running,* I found it to say very little about running.

I reverted back to Carver's original collective pronoun "we" for my title, because I am focused on trends across women runners' memoirs. However, I am not only interested in the overlap in the things these women talk about when they talk about running, but also what parts of running are *not* addressed in these memoirs. The texts in this case study make clear that if one wishes to have a (commercially) "successful" memoir, one is supposed adopt a postfeminist stance, to talk about hard work, big dreams, determination, and overcoming of obstacles, and one is not supposed to talk about failure, injury (unless it is "overcome"), trauma, or sexism. However, as this dissertation project argues, I posit that for positive change to occur in the sport of running, we need a community-based and intersectional (including feminist, antiracist, and disability-oriented) approach to broadening discourse of athletic identity, rather than a postfeminist one. We need to broaden the narrative models beyond the performance storyline.

This postfeminist trend isn't observed just in memoir. In her survey of women's non-fiction running books, from their origins in the 70s to the early millennium, Annemarie Jutel

argues that the swath of 30 plus years demonstrates a "persistent tension between the traditions of femininity and the increasing opportunities available for women today" (1006). Women's non-fiction running books, on the whole:

> ...tout their content as contributing to social and physical transformation, relying on the rhetoric of alternative lifestyle and liberation (but never meaning it) and the promotion of neo-conservatism, individualism, the understanding of oneself, and one's body as an asset. They reassured women, coaxed them, highlighted biological difference, and focussed on charm and grace. Promoting women's sports as a spectacle of femininity was vital to their acceptance….Ironically, the woman's running book announced both her liberation and her containment in traditional femininity (Jutel 1006).

Similarly, in her study of women's sport autobiographies (not limited to running) published between 1992-2015, Dawn Heinecken found that most athletes, regardless of racial or class background, present narratives that "reinforce post-feminist notions of upward mobility and heterosexual femininity while failing to confront inequalities affecting women in sport" (325). Heinecken does note, however, that there are a few more recent publications that challenge postfeminist discourse.

This chapter seeks to understand trends regarding how pro/collegiate runners represent themselves in their life narratives through the analysis of four memoirs written by women runners published from the late 1990s to early 2020s. These texts include collegiate runner Leslie Heywood's *Pretty Good for a Girl: An Athlete's Story* (1998), American Olympian Suzy Favor Hamilton's *Fast Girl: A Life Spent Running From Madness* (2015), American Olympic medallist and former American record-holder in the marathon from 2006-2022 Deena Kastor's *Let Your Mind Run: A Memoir of Thinking My Way to Victory* (2018) and American collegiate runner and Greek Olympian Alexi Pappas' *Bravey: Chasing Dreams, Befriending Pain, and Other Big Ideas* (2021).

How do these runners participate in or resist the postfeminist positioning in their memoirs of the kind observed by Jutel and Heinecken? If, as James Pipkin says "the meaning of sport is intertwined with its narrativity," then what can the structure, thematic content and dialogic nature of these life narratives tell us about the sport of running (17)? How do these texts refract sociocultural understandings of what it means to be "an athlete," "a runner" and "a woman"? How are they reflective of the temporality and positionality of their authors? Do they address the continued ways that sexism, racism and ableism interact within the sport of running?

I argue that postfeminist discourse achieves narrative salience in the memoirs of contemporary women distance runners through the manipulation of particular literary strategies and tropes related to structure, theme and audience. Athlete autobiographies are not always seen as *literary* because of the social complex in which they are constructed and circulated. My claim is that these books *are* literary texts that leverage the literary milieu in service of postfeminist sensibility.

Contextualising Memoir & The "Jockography"

The novel and the memoir often share narrative strategies and devices that render them essentially indistinguishable; this can be traced back to the modern novel developing in imitation of life writing practices (Couser 10). The key differences between fiction and memoir are the ways they claim their relationship to reality— "the novel is free to invent its own world, while the memoir must refer to an extra-textual reality" (Couser 55). Due to memoir's claims to present something that "really happened," we often forget that it shares its qualities of constructedness with fiction. Memoirists make decisions about how to present themselves and others, what anecdotes to tell, which events to put in and which to leave out; many invoke narrative

techniques often associated with fiction, such as dialogue, stream of consciousness, flashbacks and more.

This issue is why over the first half of the 20th century, social scientists were uninterested in working with autobiography because it was "too subjective" and literary scholars were wary of them as "too factual" to count as literature (Bjorklund 11). Since the 1970s however, literary scholars have started to pay more attention to autobiography and interest has particularly picked up during the "Memoir Boom" at the turn of the millennium. This "boom" (the likes of which is ongoing) has involved a dramatic increase in the publication of life narratives by both celebrity and non-celebrity authors intended for mass readership. I understand autobiography in the sense of Diane Bjorklund, as "both cultural product and social act," and in the context of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's assertion that "to reduce autobiographical narration to facticity is to strip it of the densities of rhetorical, literary, ethical, political, and cultural dimensions" (13). The density of the rhetorical, literary, ethical, political, and cultural dimensions of these running memoirs is precisely what I am interested in.

Just like we might assume an easy divide between fiction as untrue and memoir as true, we might also assume that the author of autobiography has a straightforward relationship to the protagonist of the self-narrative, that they are the same first person "I," while the fictional author has a removed positionality from their multiple characters. However, this is not such an easy distinction. Paul John Eakin asks: "why do we so easily forget that the first person of autobiography is truly plural, in its origins and subsequent formation?" (43). We assume a singularity of literature of the first person, of a consistency in identity between narrator and narrated throughout the course of a lifetime. But how many of us would say that we're the exact same person now as we were at age ten? Fifteen? How many of us would say that we will remain

the exact same person we are now in twenty years? Building from Stuart Hall's framing of identities as always in "production," in process and incomplete, Smith and Watson argue that there are "models of identity culturally available to life narrators at any particular historical moment that influence what is included and what is excluded from an autobiographical narrative" (39). What it means to be "an athlete," "a runner," "a woman," "a mother" at a given time and place—whether it be at the time being narrated within the text, or the time of the writing, will influence autobiography.

We also frequently ignore the relationality of ourselves as "I's" to others, in both life writing and representation because of what Eakin terms the "myth of autonomy," the sense that "*I* write my story; *I* say who I am; *I* create myself," rather than an understanding of the self as constantly in relation to others and produced fluidly over the course of our lives (43). Autobiography's ability to concretize the myth of autonomy is part of the reason the genre is such a popular site for the reification of the figure of the self-made man and the narrative of the American Dream, in which one pulls oneself up by one's bootstraps, a narrative that is so pervasive within the history of sport, and continues to inform the ubiquitous "performance masterplot," seen in sport media.

Remarking on the memoir boom, Lorraine Adams introduced the term, the "nobody memoir" in the 2012 review essay "Almost Famous: The Rise of the "Nobody Memoir."" This term was a play on the idea that thanks to the memoir boom, you could be a "nobody" and get published for telling your life story, versus the previously more common "somebody" (re: celebrity or notable person) memoir. Couser expanded the distinction by remarking that there has not only been a rise in "nobody" memoirs, but also "some *body*" memoirs; those that "explore

the limits and circumstances particular to one's embodiment" (275). That is, a rise in memoirs that explore what it is like to live and move through the world in a particular body.

This trend poses an interesting question regarding sporting memoir. In some cases, athletes are already well known, they are "somebodies." However, athlete stories are inherently invested in identity through athletics, making them definitively "some *body*" narratives. Women athletes through history have been less celebritized than male athletes who achieve stardom through the multi-billion dollar sports-industrial complex of big leagues like the NFL, NBA, NHL and MLB and constant coverage by mainstream media. Women athletes, even at the height of their careers and with accomplishments as impressive as their male peers, are less likely to have achieved "stardom" the same way. Layered on to this, as James Pipkin notes, women, athletes or not, are conventionally seen as "some bodies," in that the body has "been traditionally considered the primary text of their lives," whereas for men, the body comes more into focus when something goes wrong, women are always already aware of their "some bodiness" (60).

In the books analysed in this chapter, women athletes who are otherwise some *bodies* attempt to write themselves into a different form of *somebodiness*, one that is simultaneously brokered by their bodies and yet an imagined departure from the body as the sole site and source of success. It is the Olympian athlete-authors who rely most heavily on postfeminist discourse as a route to present themselves as role-model worthy *somebodies*. This aligns with the "role model rhetoric" that Helen Jefferson Lenskyj notes is often embedded in sport, and specifically Olympic, interventions: "Olympic athletes give pep talks to disadvantaged youth, inspiring them with the unrealistic message that they just have to believe in themselves, train hard, and follow their dream" (32). Positioning oneself as a role model is enculturated within the idea of the Olympics, and being "an Olympian."

There is a popular cultural script or narrative template in becoming "somebody" through being an athlete ("some body"). Sport and exercise studies scholars Kitrina Douglas and David Carless refer to it as the "performance narrative" or performance storyline/performance masterplot. This storyline is characterised by an athlete giving everything to sport; the goal of athletic success supersedes all else in his/her life because "sport is life and life is sport" (73). It is the "role model" athlete who frequently tells the performance story. While Douglas and Carless' *Life Story Research in Sport* intervened within the field of sport psychology by presenting this masterplot as dominant in almost all public portrayals of sport, individual fields had previously noted this trend in specific genres.

For example, Jeffrey Hill noted in his 2006 *Sport and the Literary Imagination* that sporting life stories are most often presented as "a Pilgrim's Progress morality tale, teaching that sporting achievement results from a single minded pursuit of excellence in the face of the many pitfalls, physical and moral, placed in the way of success" (12). Media columnist Bryan Curtis perhaps unwittingly provided new terminology for scholars of life-writing when in 2007, he identified the cultural script of what he called the "jockography," the athlete memoir, that "adhere[s] to a rigid formula": it begins with the most memorable play/performance of that athlete, charts how their sport got them through their (unhappy) childhood, and chronicles their ascendance to sporting stardom (NYT np).

The "jockography" or "traditional sport-hero narrative" often integrates multiple different autobiographical templates, such as the "conversion narrative, the coming of age and overcoming story, the physical limitations story, and the trajectory of early hope, achievement, disillusionment and distilled wisdom;" in this sense, it is a hybrid, rather than monolithic genre itself (Smith and Watson 163). But, the jockography, the sport-hero narrative in fiction, the

performance storyline in the macro sense, tends to reassure us that "by winning in the end [we] can make sense of everything that has come before—the suffering, the injustice, the confusion, the sacrifice. A victory makes it all right" (Dopp and Abdou 7). Not just in memoir, but in life, the sway of this performance storyline, this sense of "mattering" through success "initiate[s] a process of identity foreclosure that narrows down the range of future possible selves available to the individual" (Sparkes 409). That is, the primacy of the athletic identity has power in how athletes view their self-worth, and in the case of athlete-authors, consider themselves as an "I" and present their life stories. This can be particularly detrimental when it comes to injury, periods of poor performance, and retirement, as the performance masterplot's hyperfocus on physical ability leaves little room for variations in ability or disability. As such, many sport studies scholars have urged an expansion of cultural narratives of sport to counter-story the dominance of the performance storyline.

Materials and Methodology:

The texts discussed in this chapter were selected based not solely on the temporality of their publication dates, but also for the temporality of the athlete-author's career. There are affordances and limitations to this strategy. As Diane Bjorklund notes, autobiographies are influenced by the extant values and ideas of the time at which the text is written (xi). However, authors are also inherently influenced by the sociocultural era in which they grew up and their careers took/are taking place. For these reasons, I have focused on the memoirs of pro/collegiate runners published between the late 90s and early 2020 who moved through a post-Title IX collegiate sport system, that is, those whose collegiate careers post-date women's athletics being officially recognized. The passing of Title IX is what allows for rhetoric of "equality" across men's and women's athletics that postfeminist discourse relies on. These runners' professional

careers also post-date the inclusion of the women's marathon in Olympic Games, which serves a similar function in discourse of equality being "achieved" in the sport of running. Working with four texts, I am able to identify trends in women's running memoir within the last 25 years.

Even though the preference of our contemporary Western society is to emphasise the uniqueness of individual lives, reading texts about individual women runners together allows one to identify "shared vocabularies of the self" (Bjorklund xii). By looking at the demographics of the women runners who have had their memoirs published (and not just over the last decades), one observes almost exclusively white, ablebodied, heterosexual women of middle-class origins who are conventionally attractive. In this we can see the unmarked cultural norms of American women's distance running, translated into athlete memoirs.[14] As Heinecken notes, there is a tendency for white athletes to leave unrecognised their racial and/or class privilege (and I would add able-bodied) and how it functions within sport. Acknowledging privilege clashes with the postfeminist performance narrative habitus' emphasis that everything is achieved by individual hard work alone.

Leslie Heywood's memoir, *Pretty Good for a Girl*, was published in 1998. Heywood was born in the mid-60s, and her high school and collegiate career took place in the 80s. Her memoir details sexual assault and harassment by her high school coach, a struggle with disordered eating, and an ultimately career-ending injury.

[14] Focusing on distance running, rather than women's athletics as a whole, is to respect the related, but different histories of these disciplines. As white women largely abandoned the sport of track and field in the 1930s, black women's participation rose. Black women's excellence at sprinting distances (the only ones allowed) in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s was connected to the support of women's track by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Tuskegee Institute formed the first highly competitive women's track team in 1929, recruiting African American high school girls and winning 11 out of 12 Amateur Athletic Union Championships between 1937-1948. Susan Cahn argues that Black women migrated towards track as white women migrated away, in part because "African American women did not tie femininity to a specific, limited set of activities and attributes defined as separate and opposite from masculinity" (252). Thus, it is important to note both the gendered and racialized history of sprint and mid-D distances before the women's marathon was added in 1984.

Suzy Favor-Hamilton's text, *Fast Girl*, was published in 2015. Born in 1968, Favor-Hamilton competed in high school in the mid 80s and college in the late 80s - early 90s. She competed at the 1992, 1996, and 2000 Olympics. Her memoir details the stress of her running career and similar struggle with disordered eating as Heywood. But at the core of Favor Hamilton's memoir is an accounting for and of her time as a high-end escort in Las Vegas while living with undiagnosed bipolar disorder.

Deena Kastor's memoir, *Let Your Mind Run* was published in 2017. Kastor was born in 1973, her high school career took place in the late 80s and her collegiate career in the early to mid 90s. She competed at the 2000, 2004, and 2008 Olympics. Kastor's memoir charts her rise to the Olympic podium as the 2004 bronze medallist in the marathon, and her setting of the American record in the marathon at the 2006 London Marathon. Kastor's marathon record stood for over 15 years and was broken for the first time in 2022, during the composition of this dissertation, making her a longstanding figure in the contemporary running psyche. Of all the texts, hers is the most strictly a "running book;" she is also by far the most recognizable name of the group, two things that go hand in hand.

Alexi Pappas' memoir, *Bravey,* was published in 2021. Pappas was born in 1990, her high school running career took place in the mid-2000s and her collegiate career from 2008-2013. Pappas, though born in the USA, competed in the 2016 Olympic Games for Greece. Her collection of memoiristic essays wrestles with the suicide of her mother when Pappas was a child, her experience in sport, her post-Olympic period of depression, and touches on her career as a filmmaker.

My approach follows that of sport and exercise studies narrative scholars Sparkes (2002), Smith and Sparkes (2009, 2010) Sparkes and Stewart (2016), who were influenced by literary

scholars' close-reading approach to life-writing. I break down my analysis of these texts into three main foci: 1) textual themes (the *what* of the story–similar to my methodology in chapter one); 2) the structure of the texts (consideration of *how* the narrative is told); and, 3) textual dialogism (consideration of to *whom* the story is addressed and for what purposes). My approach is also informed by feminist-oriented critical discourse analysis (CDA), the purpose of which is to analyze "how gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in text and talk" (Lazar 150). As such, it is a particularly appropriate approach to memoir, which represents a social relationship between author and reader, presents social situations within its narrative, and makes identity claims on behalf of the author, often used as a tool for the reader to negotiate their own identity. My central intervention rests in my ability to use literary close-reading techniques to demonstrate how the archetypes of the athlete role model, the woman who becomes "somebody" through athletics, attain narrative salience.

Theme: What I Write About When I Write About Running

In considering the common and divergent themes across the four texts it is important to remember that the *what* of a narrative can never be fully divorced from the *how* and *to whom.* The categories that I have used to roughly delineate these areas are porous and interrelated. While the performance storyline is a structural template for charting the stereotypical athlete hero memoir, it is of course intimately interwoven with what experiences the athlete chooses to share and which she chooses to leave out, and how she frames/discusses them. In this section, I will demonstrate how athletes were clearly exposed to and engaged with the performance narrative habitus and how their early experiences in sport lent them to organise their experience

through this lens, particularly as the pressure to perform intertwined with the pressure to present the self as a Future or Alpha girl, or someone who "has it all." Then I explore the relationship between performance narrative habitus and postfeminist ideology as they pertain to the recurring theme of the "runner's body" in the memoirs. Finally, I analyse how the theme of sexism in sport is represented by the athletes, in ways that either recognize, or turn away from the systemic issues in sport in favour of individualistic solutions.

Theme: Exposure to Performance Narrative Habitus as Ideology
"I was going to be perfect"

In each of these memoirs, we see that the athletes are exposed to the performance narrative habitus as ideology while forming their athletic identities, focusing much of their self-worth on athletic performance and as such, often feeling pressure to live up to expectations. The athlete authors are encouraged to engage in the performance narrative habitus, and understand their identity/organise their experiences through it.

Part of this is the pressure to project the Alpha Girl/Future Girl mentality summed up by Favor Hamilton's response to running putting the spotlight on her: *"I was going to be perfect"* (22 emphasis mine). If the Future Girl identity is to be achievable for anyone however, it cannot be based on talent alone, it has to be based on hard work, by pulling oneself up by their spike laces, so to speak. This impacts the way hard work and talent are represented (or not represented) in these texts. All of the memoirs demonstrate their authors' adherence to a performance storyline understanding of putting every possible effort into their sport. Favor-Hamilton and Heywood have almost identical passages in which they are exasperated with their mothers for not understanding why they simply cannot take a single day off, Kastor's professional career is launched by a coach asking her "Have you given running everything?" (49), Pappas emphasises "*The world does not owe you a dream*" (302).

In Kastor and Pappas' memoirs, the ones that conform most closely to the performance storyline structurally (and the two texts that are the most commercially successful), there is an *overt rejection* of talent being the foundation from which success comes, emphasising the myth of sport as meritocracy, in order to uphold the myth of autonomy.[15] The overwhelming thesis of Kastor's book is that positive thinking is the key to athletic success and happiness in life. This is how even though the early portion of her text features some of the same sort of self-doubt and pressure to perform that is present in Heywood and Favor-Hamilton, her memoir follows the performance storyline in that she "overcomes" this through positive thinking and goes on to have a successful career. The turning point in Kastor's memoir is her "letting go" of her talent, in order to prioritise hard work and commitment as the way to running success. Of her drive to Colorado, where she is moving to pursue a professional running career post-college, she writes:

> Mostly, I thought about running. I saw myself moving down the trails as a kid, fighting to keep the lead in a race, feeling the high of winning and the low of defeat. But I saw these feelings had always been at the whim of my talent, an immovable trait, out of my control, and I had let it define me. *I've relied on you too much*, I whispered. *I'm sorry. I'll take over now* (54)

True success, it is presented then, comes not from talent, but from hard work and dedication.

Pappas' disavowal of talent is even more overt, as it occurs in a keystone anecdote of her memoir—her disagreement with President Barack Obama, in the Oval Office, about whether she is naturally gifted. While meeting the President in 2015, Pappas becomes uncomfortable when Obama, upon hearing that she is a professional runner, says, "You have a gift. You were born with a body that was meant to run long distances more than the average human…" (64). Pappas responds that her performance "was *just* a result of hard work, motivation and support from the

[15] Canadian Olympian Perdita Felicien's recent memoir, *My Mother's Daughter*, provides perhaps the most cutting denial of the performance narrative: "Sport mimics everyday life. It can be rewarding, and it can be entirely unfair. What we believe we deserve, what we have worked hard to attain, isn't always what we get" (281).

community" (64 emphasis mine). This "*just"* reaffirms the opportunity of elite athletics as open to anyone who works hard, stays motivated, and has a support network.

But Obama disagrees with her. Pappas ultimately leaves the Oval feeling like "the idea that I was meant to run, that I was born with a special ability, felt like it subtracted from my own willpower and motivation" (64). Ironically, it is the American president's assertion that if she'd reached the level of professional athletics she must have some inherent talent, that clashes with the American national myth of self-determination and rugged individualism that sport is so attached to. As Pipkin notes, sport is a cultural expression of the idea that "America's heroes are self-made individuals who rise to greatness in democratic meritocracy" (20). Pappas' brother later explains to her that while Obama was quite serious about basketball while growing up, he eventually gave up his athletic dreams when it became clear that no amount of effort on his part was going to make him taller, or achieve the level of coordination and speed that other players were able to. In response, Pappas admits that talent certainly plays a role in youth, prior to serious training. Like Kastor's "letting go" of her talent, this anecdote allows Pappas to position dedication as much more important than natural talent when it comes to success.

In this, Kastor and Pappas align themselves with many of the female athletes that Heinecken studied in her survey, who articulate what Cooky and McDonald term a "middle class achievement ideology" (333). Postfeminist in nature, this is the same ideology that has become ingrained in sport marketing rhetoric directed at women since the era of Nike's "If You Let Me Play" ad, a discourse that will be explored more deeply in my next chapter. At the end of this chapter, Pappas does seem to somewhat adjust her stance, saying that her natural talent is her "engine" but hard work is her "fuel" (77). But her direct address to the "Braveys" at the end of the chapter then undermines this adjustment: "Braveys, the biggest takeaway is this: We can't

control the engine we're given. But how we treat our engine is entirely up to us. It will take us to the moon if we let it" (77). This last line falls into the type of inspirational aphorism that forgoes the systemic critique that Pappas begins to touch on when she discusses how the culture of competitive running leaves young women vulnerable to disordered eating, body dysmorphia, and injury.

Disavowal of talent in favour of an emphasis on willpower or motivation, of mind over matter, is postfeminist, but it also interacts complexly with the fact that many of these texts deal with mental illness, and diversity of bodyminds, including bipolar disorder, depression, and eating disorders. An emphasis on willpower and motivation, the ruling of the mind over the body, is one way that systemic ableism is ingrained into the performance storyline. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes: "the disabled body exposes the illusion of autonomy, self-government, and self-determination that underpins the fantasy of absolute ablebodiednesss" (46). While Obama's example is not pointing to disability, but merely difference in physicality, Pappas reacts defensively to it as an undermining of self-determination being the key aspect of success.

In the essay/chapter entitled "The Rules," Pappas discusses how her "Always Try Hard" rule became the foundation of her identity by the time she reached middle school. The Always Try Hard rule connected to her need "to matter." While Pappas suggests that this was a response to her mother's suicide when she was young, with the logic that if she tried hard at everything, she would not end up like her mother. A disabilities studies framework allows us to read this as Pappas internalization of connecting her worth to her physical and intellectual capabilities, and an understanding that mental illness could be "overcome" through hard work. I would suggest that the Always Try Hard rule is also dovetails with the Alpha girl/Future girl ideal set forth for

girls and young women. Pappas' mother seemingly faced enormous pressure to "have it all," and such pressure may have contributed to her mental illness; as Pappas frames it: "My Mom must have had a rule that if she couldn't be *perfect*, she would rather be nothing at all" (210 emphasis mine). Pappas' mother's death is central to the memoir, and this idea of being perfect or nothing at all is rejected by Pappas, who at the end of the memoir, "overcomes" her own experience with depression and concludes that we all matter regardless of how fast we run or how many accomplishments we have. In this, Pappas walks a fine line of distinction, rejecting the idea that we matter only through our accomplishments, something that she has had to learn, but also positioning success as a matter of giving something your all and working harder than anyone else for it, rather than influenced by talent, privilege, or the bodymind one embodies.

Theme: The "Runner's Body"

These memoirs are all narratives of women who initially became "somebodies" because of physical bodies; their notoriety is directly related to their athletic performance. In all memoirs, Smith and Watson attest that it is important to consider when, where and how the body becomes visible, and this is particularly important when the premise of the writer's fame is based on their bodily capabilities. Smith and Watson's proposed reading question: "How are the narrator's body and its visibility tied to the community from which the narrator comes from?" is particularly crucial when it comes to athlete memoirs. I also want to bear in mind Elizabeth Wheeler's observation in examining first person nature-encounter narratives, that "you can't see the body that isn't there" (554). In the case of women's running memoirs of recent decades, this means an occlusion of bodies that don't meet a particular physique, as well as bodies of colour and queer bodies.

The growth of the idealisation of the "runner's body" is connected to knowledges and values promoted through the sport since the beginning of the "Running Boom" of the 70s. In her study of the phenomenon, Andrea Abbas notes that running "promotes an embodiment of middle-classness that naturalises age and gender inequalities, whilst also individualising responsibility for them" (159). In other words, the running community and industry consistently affirms the older or female body as inferior, while also communicating that it is the responsibility of women and/or older runners to "fix" their bodies to align with the idealised slender, muscular body. Thus, the notion of a prescriptive "runner's body" is inherently fatphobic. The responsibility is placed on the individual to "fix" their body precisely because running is seen as providing a means through which individuals may "overcome" these supposed defects (Abbas 161). It is the young, hyper-able, male body that is held as both the norm and superior body type. This is why Pappas' references to prepubescent-looking bodies is significant–it is prior to puberty that women's bodies most closely resemble this ideal.

Pappas, Favor Hamilton and Heywood refer consistently throughout their memoirs to the unquestioned concept of "the runner's body." The concept of the "runner's body" is part of running's sport-specific discourse upholding the postfeminist performance narrative habitus. This relationship between the performance narrative habitus and disordered eating practices has been demonstrated by sport psychologists in qualitative interviewing with athletes and even been nicknamed the "slim to win" narrative. The "slim to win" narrative is the pervasive and dangerous idea that you have to be extremely slender to be successful in distance running, that the process of slimming down/losing weight will result in faster times.[16] "Slim to win" discourse is not unique to distance running; for example, a 2019 survey of over 750 Canadian national

[16] For example, Papathomas and Lavallee (2014), Busanich, McGannon and Schinke (2012, 2014), McGannon and McMahon (2019), Cosh, Tully and Crabb (2019)

team members across all sports found that 21% identified as having an eating disorder, compared to 3% of the general Canadian population (Willson et al). In the wake of Mary Cain's 2019 revelation about the pressure to lose weight she faced as a teenage running phenom being coached in one of Nike's top programs, women athletes in particular have begun speaking out more about abusive team and coaching cultures that encourage disordered eating and body dysmorphia. I keep in mind that only Alexi Pappas' text was published after this cultural moment when I ask: how do these texts as literary narratives work with or resist the "slim to win" narrative or fatphobic and ableist discourse of the "runner's body?"

The "runner's body" is a complex discursive construct, as even when one tries to deny it power, one often ends up ultimately reifying it. For example, there has been a recent push in the running community to speak more openly about vulnerabilities for disordered eating and the risks of extreme thinness. One way to do this is to emphasise runners who achieve fast results that supposedly fall outside the "runner's body" norm—but there's the rub, this positioning ends up reasserting that these women's bodies are outliers. By saying that they don't have the typical runner's body, one ends up retrenching ideas that a singular body type is conducive to competitive running. In her *New York Times* article "Who Says Allie Kieffer Isn't Thin Enough to Run Marathons?" journalist Lindsay Crouse studiously avoids using the term "runner's body." Yet, even the title, which suggests that prevailing thought in the running world would, in fact, be that Kieffer isn't thin enough to compete at a high level, and Kieffer's own quotes that describe herself as "the big girl everyone thought they were going to beat," affirm her status as a bodily outlier.

While the concept of the runner's body and slim to win discourse are constructs that uphold the performance narrative habitus in distance running ("you must do this to win") they

also interact and intertwine with key characteristics of postfeminist sensibility, including a "cultural norm of female perfectibility," and the notion of the self-as-project (McRobbie). Also at play is the shift from sexual objectivity to subjectivity, emphasis on self-surveillance, the notion that femininity is a bodily property, and individual choice/empowerment discourse (Gill). I remember my non-runner-friend's reaction to the cross-country team photo during my first year of undergrad: "Oh my god, you all look so good. Runners have the best bodies." I think it's pretty safe to say that her comment was not directed at the "runner's body" as indicative of performance potential, but rather mired in fatphobia and societal ideals of slenderness as desirable for women.

Perhaps the most stark example of delineation of "good" and "bad" bodies navigated through sport, comes in Kathrine Switzer's memoir, *Marathon Woman*. While I did not include it within my four focus texts because it documents a pre-Title IX era, I think the following passage is important to show how the roots of women's competitive running are in fatphobic postfeminist notions of femininity as a bodily property to be navigated through sport. Switzer was instrumental in getting the women's marathon into the Olympics and increasing racing opportunities for women. In her memoir, she writes of her remembrance of seeing female athletes' photos:

> "But even alongside the graceful images of Wilma Rudolph winning the sprints, I'll never forget the compelling photo of Tamara Press, the Soviet shot putter in full grunt, with arms like hams, a jelly roll on her midriff and grimy bra straps showing. It was scary; was that what it meant to be a female athlete? A lot of people said yes, and I'm sure if it upset me, I can imagine how it discouraged thousands of other readers of Life Magazine, including plenty of young girls who would swear off sports forever" 16

Switzer emphatically contrasts Wilma Rudolph's slender body as appropriately feminine and "graceful," while Tamara Press's body is "scary" due to her "arms like hams, and a jelly roll on

her midriff." The idea that being an athlete would make you look like Press, Switzer suggests, would be enough to convince girls to never participate in sport again. The promotion of the appropriately feminine, slender and attractive marathoner, however, was to be celebrated, and women should be encouraged to participate in running, in part because of a potential to undergo some sort of bodily metamorphosis that would make them more attractive to men (according to Switzer).

The "runner's body" that Favor Hamilton, Heywood and Pappas narrate is a prescriptive body type—thin, small-chested, light, lithe, strong and weighing not that much over 100 pounds, it looks "prepubescent." Heywood and Favor Hamilton present the runner's body as an ideal that drove them to bodily manipulation practices like disordered eating and breast reduction surgery. Favor Hamilton, even as an Olympian, was aware that she didn't have "the perfect running body...it wasn't enough to *be* a great runner, I had to *look like* a great runner too" (74, emphasis mine). And this notion is culturally reinforced, such as when *Runner's World* magazine airbrushed Favor Hamilton's chest to make it appear smaller when she appeared on their cover. This was the final straw for Favor Hamilton, compelling her to "secretly" pay for breast-reduction surgery, after which she could be "happy that at least I looked the way that runners were supposed to look" (74).

Favor Hamilton and Heywood both include extended passages with intimate details of the logistics of how they hid their eating disorders and Favor Hamilton explicitly ties disordered eating to the runner's body: as a high schooler, she observes that "the college level runners I saw were far thinner than I was. They all looked anorexic and I wanted that for myself" (32). Neither Favor Hamilton or Heywood depicted disordered eating practices in a glorified light, but rather in revelatory exposition of the lengths that young athletes may feel they have to go to perform, or

to grasp at control over their performance. However, these athlete-authors do not question that the Alpha Girl runner is supposed to look a certain way, nor do they question how they were interpellated into understanding their "runner's bodies" as garnering power from the male gaze. In Heywood's case, the compounded years of physical and nutritional stress on her body ultimately remove her completely from the sport of running. Even with this very clear indicator within her memoir that engaging in disordered eating practices as a way to live out a performance ideology is both dangerous and unsustainable, Heywood still does not question the runner's body as a concept. Even at the end of the most feminist-oriented memoir of the group, she writes that she no longer has "a runner's body. I don't weigh 110 anymore" (194). This is Heywood writing as the narrating "I," not presenting herself as the younger narrated "I," demonstrating that despite her distance from and reflection on her experience as a young runner, the idea of the runner's body remains.

Pappas both rejects and affirms the notion of a runner's body associated with extreme thinness that manifests in a "prepubescent" look. While she does not herself struggle with disordered eating behaviours as Heywood and Favor Hamilton did, she addresses the prevalence of disordered eating culture in running. Pappas tells pointed anecdotes, including a teammate being forced to hold 5 pound weights in each hand and swing them, to get a feel for how much easier the running motion is when you lose 10 pounds. Pappas clearly states that athletes with eating disorders are more injury prone, and claims that it breaks her heart when she thinks of all the young athletes who quit running "because the system made them feel as if they "weren't built for distance running'" (70). And yet that there is a distinct runner's body is also unquestioned in Pappas' text: "being a competitive distance runner in Division I required a level of fitness that goes beyond the "strong not skinny" vibe and instead pushes you into a head-turning category of

strength. I wasn't a gazelle. I was a feral bobcat. I was strong and skinny. I fit in just fine with elite distance runners but when I was among civilians I stood out" (234). Pappas' assertion of the harm of disordered eating practices, but affirmation that there is a certain type of body that is in-group versus out-group for elite distance runners, ends up reinforcing the idea of a singular body type that achieves performance success.

It is urgent that the running community reform abusive team and coaching cultures that encourage disordered eating and body dysmorphia. An intersectional feminist, disability studies approach may be useful in this regard. In each of the texts in which disordered eating practices are described, the focus, as one might expect in memoir, is individual experience, and consequently individual advice to the reader not to emulate that behaviour. However, the running community needs to move away from "person-fixing" to "context-changing," focusing instead on "the social, political, and intellectual contingencies that shape meaning and behaviour" (Linton 6). Not asking athletes to lose weight is the bare minimum; what the running community must really start to address is the unpacking of the way that the discursive concept of the "runner's body" is intertwined with fatphobia, sexism, racism, and ableism.

Pretty good for a girl and *Fast girl* clearly demonstrate how discourse of the runner's body is gendered and sexualized. Both Heywood and Favor Hamilton frame their bodies as explicitly sexually desirable *because* they are runner's bodies. But the desirability has less to do with the sport and more to do with tone and slenderness achieved through a sport associated as appropriately feminine. As Rosalind Gill frames it, postfeminism characterises the body as "women's source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgements of female attractiveness" (149). As Heinecken notes, athlete memoirists are most

likely to claim freedom from gendered constraints when (and without identifying that) their appearance "conforms to Western beauty standards of white heterosexual attractiveness" garnered through participation in "female identifying sports like volleyball and figure-skating" (328). Favor Hamilton seems particularly aware that the desirability of her runner's body has more to do with a femininely appropriate combination of slender and strong, as she recounts that her "favourite lie" to tell her escort clients was that she was a gymnast in university, "because it seemed to match my petite but strong frame and [...] it was always a turn on for my clients" (3). This description occurs in the prologue of the memoir, alerting the reader right off the marks of the intersections between sexual desirability, gender and sporting bodies. Both Heywood and Favor Hamilton narrate themselves as powerful because of their ability to attract the male gaze, through their runner's bodies.

This intersection also comes up when Favor Hamilton writes that after her disappointing performance at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, that: "I heard whispers that I wasn't good enough to attract all the money and attention I'd received going into the Olympics. Other female athletes criticised me for getting praised for my looks. I was making a lot of money, more than many of my peers who were running as fast or faster than I was, and they felt like I was getting more attention than I deserved" (74). While Favor Hamilton includes this anecdote as an entrypoint to talking about why her self-esteem and confidence was shaken, it also functions as an admission that sport and particularly the business side of sport—sponsorship, marketing and promotion—values white, cis-gendered, able-bodied physical attractiveness, particularly when it comes to women athletes. Heywood includes a similar anecdote about how her image was selected for use on team publicity. She writes: "I have been chosen to stand for Arizona cross-country, and a feature article early in the season presents me as the number one runner. SHE

RUNS "A" SLOPE BECAUSE IT'S THERE the headline says, over a shot of me taking "A" mountain in my flashdance shirt, my face bleached beautiful and blank. "*You can have it all,"* the article says, and for all anyone knew, my life says it too" (176). While Heywood is ostensibly selected because she is the team's top performance, her physical appearance is used to suggest the ability to "have it all"—to be athletic, and physically attractive.

While Favor Hamilton and Heywood engage experiences which reinforce that their bodies were/are "better" because they are runner's bodies—sexier, "elite," and part of the universally-admired Alpha/Future/Golden girl identity, Pappas' representation of her embodiment is more complicated, perhaps because her book is more recent and released into a fraught environment when it comes to body politics. Pappas chooses to note that her highly-trained "new body" in particular was intimidating for other women and impacted her female friendships: "I could tell that some girls would feel self-conscious around me, but the truth is that I felt self-conscious too. I stood out rather than fit in" (235). Her assertion that her body made other women "self-conscious" signals that her body is viewed by other women as desirable.

It is Pappas experience with a women's running group called "The Janes" that "helped me understand that a lean, strong body was not repulsive; it was attractive. It doesn't project unlikability, as I thought before; it projects *discipline*" (237 emphasis mine). The notion of the "disciplined," controlled, managed, perfected body is the bodily signifier of the postfeminist sensibility of self-surveillance and self-as-project. That the "disciplined" body is not just an athletically competent one, but also an "attractive" one, demonstrates the enmeshment of femininity as a bodily property and the practice of sport within a postfeminist era.

Similarly to "the runner's body" Sarah Jacquette Ray has observed the trend of a "wilderness body ideal" with in adventure culture. Like "the runner's body" the "wilderness

body ideal" is "able, thin, young and male" and also seen "figuratively and literally [as] external evidence of internal qualities" (42). This is the rhetorical move Pappas makes when she emphasises a lean body as projecting discipline. Wheeler writes that "thinking through one's own body can produce normate assumptions about other people's bodies" (554). In this case, Pappas' thinking through of her own relationship to her own hyperable athletic body produces a normate assumption that lean, strong bodies are attractive and *disciplined*, inherently suggesting that bodies that do not fit these parameters are "undisciplined."

Despite being the text that devotes the most space to training and racing related content, the body remains strikingly absent from Kastor's memoir, while the mind's power of positive thinking and determination is highlighted. In this case, the decision *not* to include any extended consideration of the body is significant. By locating the key to athletic success in the mind, Kastor avoids addressing her white, female, abled body as embedded within running culture and that of broader Western culture. As such, she does not have to address sport-specific or societal celebration of certain kinds of bodies the way that Heywood, Favor Hamilton and Pappas do. Avoidance of body talk other than that of the most factual kind renders her text closest to Pipkin's prototype of the male jockography, in which the body comes into focus when something goes wrong, rather than a constant awareness of the bodily beyond functionality alone.

The one way that the body shows up in all of the texts is through reference to injury. The mindset that performance is tied to self worth is intrinsic to the performance narrative habitus that so many athletes are exposed to. It is clear from each of the memoirs that when self-worth is tied to sport, injuries can be devastating. Kastor writes that when she was uninjured during college she felt "valued, like a contributor. Then another injury would hit and my judgement was quick and harsh: You're fragile, totally worthless" (44). For Heywood, being told she can no

longer run is "like returning from a trip to find you no longer have a house, my world is gone from me [...]The kind of 'I am' in the back of the throat, the reason to eat, not eat, to breath, to stretch, to think" (50). Pappas puts it the most directly: "as an athlete, I found it impossible to separate my identity from my injured body" (127). The disabled bodymind challenges the performance storyline's emphasis on mind over matter, and as such, tends to get short shrift in texts that align with a postfeminist performance storyline. What if we gave them more space?

As an injured runner, the author's moments of self-doubt in the face of injury likely would have resonated with me, as I too, at the time, felt as though my self-worth was tied to my ability to run (and specifically to run at a certain level). Sporting systems need to be made safer to prevent injury, athlete wellness needs to be prioritised over performance, and greater support and accommodation needs to be in place within team cultures for when athletes do sustain temporary or lasting injuries that do not focus solely on the individual athlete "overcoming." A trickier task to deal with is the systemic ableism of competitive sports that is inherent when athletes (often starting at a young age) are taught to think of sporting ability as a crucial piece of identity.

Theme: Representing Sexism

To what extent does sexism within the sport of running present as a theme in each of these texts? The postfeminist performance narrative ideology rests upon ideas of meritocracy, of hard work being unstoppable. As such, there isn't much room to acknowledge systemic barriers that women face. Each author includes instances of sexism in their memoir, but what is most significant is whether they locate issues of sexism within "bad apple" individuals, or as a systemic issue within the sport of running.

Heywood recounts being sexually assaulted by her track coach as a high schooler and publicly sexually harassed by the same coach while other male coaches and athletes looked on, for example, telling her to run extra repeats through a sprinkler so that they can see through her shirt. These instances are presented by Heywood not just as "bad guys," but being intimately connected to a male-dominated sport culture.

Favor Hamilton recounts finding out that a coach on the men's team had filmed her while running, and was playing the film for his athletes so they could see how her breasts bounced. While Favor Hamilton identifies this as "sexist ogling," it is included in the memoir as part of the reason she ultimately decides to get a breast reduction, rather than a pointed observation about the sexism female athletes face in a collegiate sporting system run overwhelmingly by men. It is written off as one bad guy.

Overt sexism is not present in Kastor's memoir; what we see is a recollection of how her male professional teammates, whom she felt like she had close relationships to, began to be quite cruel to her once she started having success. They call her "Big Time," and tell her that they never liked her to start with. This could be read as a somewhat subtler form of sexism, of men not being able to deal with women achieving athletic prowess equivalent to or exceeding their own. But this is not addressed and the experience is somewhat written off as the group of men being poor sports, rather than part of a larger attitude towards women's success.

In Pappas' memoir, there is some acknowledgment of the systemic nature of issues, particularly in the anecdote Pappas includes in which she is told she must pick a single sport in high school when boys are encouraged to be multi-sport athletes. Yet still the ultimate message is that the Braveys must take good care of their own bodies. The adherence to the individual

responsibility required to uphold the performance storyline ends up undoing any recognition of systemic issues.

In Favor Hamilton, Kastor and Pappas' texts (the "somebody" texts), when anecdotes that include sexist acts are told, they are framed as issues with individuals, or for the individual women to solve. As Lazar phrases it, "self-focused 'me-feminism' of this sort shifts attention away from the collective 'we-feminism'" (154). This is the "tak[ing] into account" of feminism and reframing of issues in discourses of individuality that Angela McRobbie sees as definitional of a postfeminist sensibility. Heywood is the only author who ultimately rejects the postfeminist performance narrative by recognizing sexism as systemic issue to be addressed in a "we-feminist" context, rather than the preferred "me-feminism" context of the other three.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that women's running fiction does try to engage issue that impact women's sport–sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, devaluation, RED-S, and limitations to access– in the way that Dawn Heinecken has argued is urgent. The same cannot be said for women's distance running memoir from the late 90s on.

Structure: How I Write When I Write About Running

The performance narrative habitus is a way of understanding and making sense of the world that relies on ideas like hard work and dedication as the key to success, exclusive focus on sport being positive, achievement as happiness. The performance storyline is a structural representation of this ideology—this is the one critics of the jockography have referred to as the "golden success story" (Whannel) or "Pilgrim's Progress tale" (Hill).

Turning now to the structure of these memoirs, that is considering *how* they are presented, I consider the structural similarities/differences between these memoirs and how they relate to the dominant sporting performance storyline. In this section, I am asking whether the athletes choose to

structure their memoirs in a fashion that follows the performance storyline, or do they model what Taylor calls an "ups and downs" narrative, generally "favoured by the less celebrated sporting figure and [...] characterised by oscillation between success and failure but without a victorious conclusion" or, as an other alternative, the "rise and fall" narrative, in which there is an "initial rise to glory with a subsequent waning of talent, motivation and success" (479). Or do they do none of the above?

Charting Structure

To chart the structure of each of the texts, I broke them down by chapter, noting key ideas and anecdotes contained in each. I then used this data to chart the arc of the narrative, paying particular attention to three key structural elements: the opening, the turning point(s), and the closing. A memoir's opening (or that of any text) is important because it serves as the reader's first impression of the author and sets the tone for the narrative. A memoir's turning point(s) reflect a significant change in situation or pivotal moment for the author that shapes the direction of the narrative. A memoir's closing serves as the reader's final impression of the text and impresses the "lessons" of the narrative.

Post-feminist discourse and the pressure to structure one's life narrative according to the performance storyline lead to an emphasis on "overcoming" and the final positioning of the athletes as "better off" or "stronger" for what they have gone through.

In the case of Favor Hamilton, the body of her memoir ends with a suicide attempt and her diagnosis with Bipolar Disorder. The epilogue however, returns her to the joy of running, and her family as she has received the medical help she needs:

> As I run, I feel my muscles loosen, stretching and contracting from memory. It was once my running that made me a role model, even though I had little desire for the attention or that burden. I came to hate the thing I loved most, the thing I was born to do. But now, I have a new purpose, new goals that have nothing to do with crossing the finish line first. I want to share my story. (292)

In Favor Hamilton's epilogue, she regains the joy in running when her goals no longer have to do with crossing the finish line first. Heinecken found in her study of women athlete's memoirs that the authors often depict the solution to pain and trauma to be the practice of sport in a more feminine way, or through achieving "moderation." This is significant because "notions of moderation have a long history in women's sports, functioning as a primary means of countering ideas that sports would masculinize women and harm their reproductive abilities" (Heinecken 336). However, Heinecken's feminist critique of how moderation in exercise/athleticism is framed as more "feminine," with feminine being a euphemism for less competitive, and less intense, is also an ableist form of feminism.

The passage above also directly narrates Favor Hamilton's transition from positioning herself as a "somebody" (a role model) through being "some body" (an athlete) to emphasising her status as "somebody" (a role model) through being a mental health advocate. And the route to this new somebodiness is achieved not through athletic performance, but through the sharing of her *story*. Thus, Favor Hamilton attempts to recuperate her life story back into the trajectory of the performance storyline's triumphant ending, but does so in a way that is divorced from competitive running itself. Her triumphant ending is that she now views her battle with Bipolar Disorder as "a gift" that has enabled her to teach her daughter (and the readers of the book!) that guilt and shame are wasted emotions.

Deena Kastor's memoir follows Curtis' proposed formula for a jockography the most closely. It opens in media res, dropping the reader into a stream of consciousness sequence of Kastor's 2004 Olympic Marathon, arguably her most notable result. After a taste of her greatest performance, the text goes back to her childhood. While not framed as "unhappy" as Curtis' formula describes, during adolescence and young adulthood Kastor's relationship with running is

framed as having ups and downs, particularly with pressure on her to perform as a high school athlete and discouragement and frustration regarding injuries in college. The turning point of her narrative comes after graduating college, when she "lets go" of her talent and dedicates herself to hard work, effectively buying into the "all in" mentality of the performance narrative habitus. The next two sections of the book chart track her "rise to major league stardom," as much as that expression can be applied to running. In the text's final chapter, Kastor describes her pregnancy, new family life and running for joy and challenge. Motherhood is her "new direction."

Thus in Kastor's memoir we see not only the macro-level structure of the performance storyline in the way she charts her life story, but also the representation of the buying into performance ideology as the turning point for the narrative. The subtitle of Kastor's memoir is *"Thinking my way to victory*." A strong mental game and positive thinking are framed her secret to success, and are also tools for crafting the memoir so that it follows the performance storyline. The final paragraph of Kastor's text reads: "The next day as we toured the city as a family, I thought about the power of a single positive choice, how it is the first step into the story we want to create, the outcome we desire (281)." Like with Favor Hamilton, the end of the text places Kastor safely within the heteronormative nuclear family and positions her as "somebody" (a role model) not just through being "some body" (an athlete), but through being a sort of positive-psychology coach. Also like Favor Hamilton, Kastor refers to agency over one's life narrative, the crafting of one's *story* being completely in the hands of the individual. As the woman athlete with the most success of the group, Kastor's memoir adheres the most closely of all to the masculinist performance narrative's structure.

Alexi Pappas' memoir begins with memories of her mother, who died by suicide when Pappas was five. Like with Favor Hamilton, this opener signals a driving force of the book other

than that of narrating sporting life—working through the loss of a parent to mental illness. The turning point of Pappas' text, and the element of the book most discussed in the media surrounding it, is Pappas' own experience with depression post-Olympics. Pappas' chapter long description of her experience with depression is the most detailed/extended representation of injury in all of the texts, and in fact, any running memoir I have read. It is candid about self-doubt, suicidal ideology, insomnia, fatigue, and it underlines the importance of asking for help. It is also neatly contained within a singular chapter: "Now, on the other side of the darkest time of my life, I understand what my dad meant when he said I could conquer this and end up better than before. Even though it nearly killed me, I achieved what my mom could not" (156). Pappas' depression has to be contained and complete for *Bravey* to end with the essay/chapter titled "For Those Who Dream," an ode to the American Dream inspired performance narrative habitus.[17] She claims that her success comes down to "choosing commitment over interest [...] even though commitment is *always* the harder path to take, especially when the going gets tough. This is why so few people actually achieve their dreams" (291). While making a gesture to systemic barriers, she ultimately reasserts emphasis on individual responsibility: "You can either stop making excuses for yourself, or you can lead a life defined by your excuses" (300). Thus, the arc of her narrative and the "overcoming" of her depression ultimately follow the performance storyline. Like Favor Hamilton and Kastor, Pappas emphasises to readers that they are the ones in control of their own story: "Remember, your narrative is entirely subjective and completely up to you" (303). Pappas positions herself as a "somebody" (a role model) not because she is "some body" (an athlete), but because she is someone who overcame depression and located her self-worth internally rather than externally.

[17] One can observe the similarities between this rhetoric and that of "Dream Crazier" examined in chapter three.

There is a marked difference between the arc of the Olympian narratives and that of Heywood as a relative "nobody" even after telling her "some body" story. The Olympians assert the postfeminist stance of being stronger for everything they have gone through. In each case, they emphasise to the reader that they too have complete power to craft their own life *story*. This assurance not only asserts a postfeminist emphasis on individuality and self-creation, it is also a notable assertion to make at the end of a memoir, which is, in essence, a construction of one's own life story.

The writing of life narrative is an exercise in choosing what to include and what to leave out. Pappas, for example, chooses not to include her decision-making process about applying for Greek citizenship to be able to compete at the Olympics for Greece, a theoretically significant life choice. When she does write about competing for Greece, she makes claims about being able to inspire "a fledgling Olympic dream for a young [Greek] girl who would never have considered sports otherwise"—not because her times would have been unlikely to make the US Olympic team (96). The reminder that one's life narrative is "entirely subjective" and "completely up to you" in each case, while cajoling the reader to frame things positively (sometimes toxically so), is also an invitation into postfeminist self-creation that reframes or obscures experiences that do not align with a performance storyline, into examples of "overcoming" and fodder for role model rhetoric. For example, at the 2008 Olympics, Kastor is forced to drop out early due to a sudden stress fracture during the race. When the medical van picks her up, she thinks: *"Why me? Why was I the one?* I caught my tone. *Well, no, wait a second. I'm not a victim here. This is a big deal, but maybe a big deal has a big lesson to teach*" [...] After a crushing blow, the consistent practice [of positive thinking] allowed me to arrive at a place of acceptance and relative peace in record time" (261). She hasn't even left the medical

van before she has reframed the experience as a lesson, and in that sense, "overcome" it. Even devastating injuries are represented as learning opportunities that "happened for a reason," or "lessons to be learned" to maintain the book's sense of a constant upward trajectory, or the overcoming of obstacles.

Heywood's text, in which a major life event is a sexual assault by her high school coach, does not assure readers that they have complete control over their life narrative, nor does it position herself as having "overcome" such an experience, but rather still in the (perhaps never finished) process of healing.

While Favor Hamilton, Kastor, and Pappas all refer to sharing and crafting their stories (and that you can do it too!), Heywood stays far away from the rhetoric that she had and has total control over her life story. Conversely, in her final chapter she describes the experience of reading a "government report about us [women athletes], the first of its kind" (192). Rather than assuring her reader of her control over her story, Heywood remarks on the uncanniness of recognizing the outlines of her experience in a governmental report:

> Strange to see these words about yourself, your ghosts, your days, your fiery dreams, all sealed up in a report. Your story, with its guts missing. No smell of fear. No burning lungs from too many sprints. No shouting voices, the blood's rush through the temples, just words. [...] I learned the name for what I had: *female athlete triad*: eating disorders, exercise compulsion, leading to amenorrhea, loss of bone. It is good to have names. It is good to know that others have lived your craziness.
>
> But I wonder about what had gone missing, all the things the report didn't say. (192)

Rather than seeing her story as something she crafted and controlled, Heywood sees her story represented in a governmental report about the female athlete triad (now RED-S), something that no one "chooses." The report isn't a life story though, it has the "guts missing" in that it does not capture the trauma, emotion, the physical experience of what sporting culture is like for many. And crucially, to

Heywood, the report does not consider any cultural explanation for why such a story, one that is not unique to her, is actually fairly common. The report does not address the "social, political, and intellectual contingencies that shape meaning and behaviour" surrounding RED-S, leaving it within the medical, rather than social, model of considering (dis)ability (Linton 6).

Heywood's memoir also refutes the trend that Heinecken noted in postfeminism-influenced women athlete memoirs–the depiction of the solution to trauma in sport to be moderation, "finding balance," or a "more feminine" (re: less competitive, less intense) practice of sport. Heywood charts an opposite experience. She returns to sport, choosing competitive weightlifting as her focus, in part because it sits at the opposite end of the spectrum with regard to bodily and gendered expectations to her experience as a competitive runner. In the gym, counting reps, she thinks: "Here's one for all the times someone told me a girl should be feminine and petite, that I'd better watch out or I'd get too big […] and here's my final tortured rep for those who said they could love me only if I could be just a little bit nicer and quieter, please, not quite so intense" (194). Instead of returning her to a domestic space or nuclear family, Heywood ends her memoir with herself pushing her body in a sport culturally-coded as masculine, and pushing her mind to resist that discourse and the body dysmorphia that running culture embedded within her psyche.

Shared Writing Strategies

The use of implied or explicit metaphors of fragmentation/multiple identities in order to make sense of the multiplicity of their selves within their life stories is a trend in distance runners' memoir, most visible in the athletes whose career trajectory does not as easily align with the performance storyline (Favor Hamilton and Heywood). John Updike said that as we age, we "leave behind this litter of dead, unrecoverable selves," and that autobiographical writing is a way of dealing with this "unbearable" knowledge. Eakin takes up this point by observing that

"the selves we may have been seem to us as discrete and separate as the other people with whom we live our relational lives. This experiential truth points to the fact that our sense of continuous identity is a fiction, the primary fiction of all self-narration" (93). Some of the memoirs at focus engage in structural and rhetorical strategies that reject the sense of continuous identity, which is frequently a hallmark of autobiographical writing. Rather than solely as a strategy for understanding the self as subject to growth and change, the memoirs often present the women as essentially *needing* to be different people, or embody certain identities, like that of the Alpha/Future Girl in different situations and/or needing to separate and hide parts of the self in order to cope with pressure or trauma.

Carless and Douglas use a theatre analogy to describe how the performance narrative habitus impacts athletes. *Playing the part* of the athlete means performing in ways that align with the performance script, "consciously modifying their story (what they say) and behaviours (what they do) by telling and enacting performance stories in public...In private, however, they articulate a different life story and enact another set of behaviours" (138). Similarly, *playing the part* of the Alpha Girl/Future Girl includes modifying one's behaviour and self-presentation publicly to meet can-do expectations, while perhaps privately feeling or identifying differently. Memoir is a particularly cogent genre to consider here because it dances along the public/private divide. The athlete authors, particularly Favor Hamilton and Heywood, whose life stories have difficulty following the performance storyline, deal with the cracks in the veneer of the "having it all" Alpha Girl athlete through their writing strategy of depicting fragmented identity. I am interested in these moments because they illustrate the author-athlete's *awareness* of the performative aspect of the Alpha Girl athlete. While I am arguing that the general trend of women distance runner memoirs is to manipulate literary strategies to give postfeminist

discourse narrative salience, in this section I want to look at how the literary strategy of implied or explicit fragmentation within the texts is mobilised by the athlete authors to account for the fissures in a cohesive postfeminist identity.

Favor Hamilton is the most explicit example, in that she literally created a double life for herself, going by the name of Kelly when she worked as an escort. Being Kelly was a way to make "Suzy, the former athlete, the realtor, the wife, the mom," disappear (2). While Kelly was invented during the phase in which Favor Hamilton's bipolar disorder was undiagnosed, Favor Hamilton understands Kelly as "a real part of me that felt like it had always been lurking inside wanting to get out" (195). Even though the invention of Kelly was in part due to an episode of mental illness, she also represents Favor Hamilton's escape from pressure to be the All-American, golden girl, the woman who has it all. Favor Hamilton explicitly frames Kelly as the type of woman who would have quit running when it no longer inspired her, and *Fast Girl* details at length how much Favor Hamilton was not enjoying training and felt enormous anxiety about performing, but stuck with it because that was what was expected of her.

Heywood refers to herself both as having dual "athlete" and "girl" identities that she must navigate back and forth between; in the first chapter of the memoir, when retelling the story of a team practice, she writes: "my hill-domination firmly in place, I can be a girl" (8). When she is both an athlete and a girl at the same time, it is as the Alpha/Future girl. Heywood also dissociates from herself when she is sexually assaulted, a reaction that is common as a trauma response:

> But I have no mouth. I am not in my own skin. Looking down, I am watching this other girl in my body, my bed [...] I know at this moment I have known this girl for a while and I haven't liked her. She got me into this, she. Smiling and flirting too much and too much [...] She is pitiful so *like my mother.*

During this dissociation, the "I" is the one watching, the "girl" is the one it is happening to. Not only that, the watching "I" victim-blames the girl for flirting too much and getting "me" into this, demonstrating the influence of internalised sexism through attempting proximity to masculinity in sport. It is made clear that the "I" is the Alpha Girl athlete in the aftermath of the assault. When the coach sends flowers, "*she* likes this," when he starts pushing harder at practice, "*I* like this" (59). However, the memoir is not reliably narrated solely with "the runner" using first person pronouns and "the girl" referred to as she/her. For example, in the following passage: "There are two faces in the picture, two different girls. One is the bright, hopeful, all-American kid, a girl in ways that are clean...Hard on the heels of the first girl is the second, just a little too sexy to be clean. Suggestive. She's the runner…" (178). Neither the all-American girl nor the runner are referred to using personal pronouns. In this instance, both the all-American girl and the "suggestive" runner are separate segments of the narrated "I" that the narrating "I" is acknowledging.

Key to understanding the metaphor of fragmentation in Favor Hamilton and Heywood is that compartmentalised selves allow them to account for their public presentation as the Alpha Girl/Future Girl, which is referred to by both of them as the "all-American girl." This is a uniquely appropriate naming connection, as "All-American" refers to both a cultural ideal and collegiate sporting achievement.

At the end of Heywood's *Pretty Good for a Girl* the narrating "I" attempts to recognize as separate, but absorb for the purposes of healing and closure, her younger self, by describing her as a ghost. She writes in her memoir's final page: "I call out to my ghost, still running, still charging the straights and floating the curves. I tell her it's okay now. She can get off the track. She can rest. She smiles, hands on her hips, takes a deep breath, shakes her head, runs off down

the track's far lanes" (212). The fact that the ghost of Heywood's younger self does not rest, does not get off the track, represents how telling her younger self that she *can* rest might release the older Heywood of some of her trauma inflicted by performance/Alpha ideology—but it does not change what happened to her younger self. It does not change the systems that led her to feel unable to stop in so many areas of her life.

Within Pappas' memoir, fragmentation is expressed within the macro-level organisational structure of the text. She foregoes the traditional chronological continuous narrative for essayistic individual chapters that are loosely chronological, creating a fragmented sense of her life. It is also what allows her contradictions throughout the text, in that we see her positioning herself in different ways in response to different experiences. While we do not see the trope of fragmented identity or "separate selves" as explicitly as in Heywood and Favor Hamilton, the structural organisation of Pappas' memoir as separate essays creates a similar effect. For example, in the chapter/essay "Puberty Power," which discusses the weight-related pressure and culture of disordered eating that exists in distance running as a feminist issue, Pappas presents puberty as a superpower and condemns how the sport frequently prioritizes fitness over long term health, particularly for women athletes, stating: "My mature body was far more durable and powerful and capable than the twisted Peter Pan prepubescent body that most female athletes feel pressured to maintain" (70). In a later chapter/essay entitled "Flat Chest and Freakishly Gnarled Feet," Pappas, mulls over a comment left on a review of her movie, *Tracktown*. The commenter had written that he was uncomfortable during *Tracktown*'s sex scene because the protagonist, portrayed by Pappas had "the body of a fourteen-year-old" (232). Pappas responds to this criticism writing: "My character, Plumb, was being sexual in the way she knew how, as a female athlete existing in a state of perpetual prepubescence" (232). While Pappas certainly has every

right to be frustrated with a commenter offering an unsolicited opinion about her body, in rebutting the sexist comment, she affirms the very idea that she contradicted in the prior chapter—that female athletes exist in a state of perpetual prepubescence, instead affirming that there is one way that female distance athletes look. Pappas' affirmation and rejection of the "prepubescent runner's body" in different essayistic chapters in her memoir is an apt representation of the push and pull of cultural discourse of postfeminist performance and feminist-oriented reform within the sport of running. In "Puberty Power," she makes a feminist-oriented argument that a cultural emphasis on thinness is harmful to young women runners. In "Flat Chest and Freakishly Gnarled Feet," that feminst-oriented argument is taken into account and rendered unnecessary when she asserts that "prepubescent" is simply how (all) women runners look.

Kastor is perhaps a counter-example to my argument that metaphors of fragmentation are ways to communicate the fissures of postfeminist messaging. *Let Your Mind Run* indulges in the fiction of a cohesive singular identity the most out of any text. The one example of a fragmentation is created to emphasise the postfeminist theme of hard work and positive thinking being the key to success. As a child, high school and collegiate runner, Kastor understands her talent as separate from herself, yet still a part of her. After finishing sixth place at a state meet that she was projected to win, she asks her talent: *"Where were you?* [...] feeling as if my ability betrayed me, strung me along only to stand me up when I needed it most. *Can I trust you? Will you be there next time?*" (34). Conceptualising her talent as a separate entity could be viewed as a way to make sense of/organise her understanding of performance in the light of the high expectations and pressure placed on her to enact the Future Girl identity, a way of understanding her performance outcomes as not solely up to her, and therefore perhaps not solely representative

of her entire identity. And yet, the turning point of the narrative *is* the adoption of a sense of totality of responsibility and individual autonomy over performance.

Dialogic: Who I Write to When I Write About Running

Sporting memoirs offer to readers a model of how to be an athlete, and as a result, influence how their reader interprets their own athletic experience. Couser presents the influence of memoir as stronger than that of fiction because "memoir seeks to exert *leverage* (force) on reality in a way that fiction typically does not. It has, or aspires to have, more *traction* (pulling power) than fiction" (170). Andrew Sparkes makes a similar claim regarding the traction of sporting memoir in his analysis of Lance Armstrong's *It's Not About the Bike*, arguing that the text must be seen as "both a repository of cultural meaning and *a model for future lives*" (422 emphasis mine). In this section, I examine who these memoirs are addressing and for what purpose. To do so, I want to begin with considering the rhetorical situation surrounding each of the athlete authors and how that relates to the messaging in their narrative.

Favor Hamilton, Kastor and Pappas are Olympians. Heywood's running career ended in college and she never ran professionally, but rather went on to become an English Professor. In this sense, Favor Hamilton, Kastor and Pappas' memoirs are more accurately thought of as those who became "somebodies" through their experiences as "some bodies," while Heywood's is that of someone who remained a "nobody" who tells her experience of "some body." By extension, Favor Hamilton, Kastor and Pappas face greater pressure to provide an expected story of "overcoming" associated with jockography for mass audiences. Heywood's memoir is the strongest in its critique of how the sporting system fails young women, potentially in part *because* she is removed from the sphere of professional sport and the need to position her life experiences and self as a role model.

Professional athletics is not a lifelong career. The "some body" of the professional athlete is not a lifelong embodiment. Therefore the Olympic distance runners must cultivate a "somebodiness" beyond the athletic body. Thus, for the Olympians, the memoir is also an exercise in self-branding. As Sarah Banet-Weiser notes, cultural spheres that we like to consider "authentic" including "self-identity, creativity, politics and religion [...] are increasingly formed as branded spaces" (5). Postfeminist sensibility creates a sense of the imperative of self-branding and this is nowadays most often cultivated through interactive social media and online content (see chapter 4). However, as these texts show, the genre of memoir can serve as the ultimate landscape for the representation of a postfeminist performance storyline life narrative, the branding of the self as a Can-Do, role-model athlete.

The understanding of the self-as-brand "impacts the way we understand who we are, how we organise ourselves in the world" and most crucially when it comes to memoir "what stories we tell ourselves [and others] about ourselves" (Banet-Weiser 5). My survey demonstrates that this is done through employing literary narrative strategies to substantiate a postfeminist 'role model' self-brand. Whereas for Heywood, as a relative "nobody" is able to engage with more feminist cultural critique in part because she is not attempting to marketize her memoir and self as a "role model."

Though Amazon charts are an imperfect marker of popularity (not only do they not capture in-person book sales, the same text can be listed in multiple formats—audio book, kindle, hard/soft cover), they can be useful for a high-level sense of the demand for certain books and types of books. Approximately a third of the texts (32) on Amazon's top 100 best sellers in "Running and Jogging" are memoirs, demonstrating the participation of sport media in the "Memoir Boom." Of those, seven texts are by women, and Pappas' text appears in all three

versions (audio, kindle and hardcover). Her text in its different formats makes up almost half of all the representation of women's memoir. Of the texts I am analysing, only Pappas and Kastor appear in the top 100 (*Let Your Mind Run* sits at number 32) in this category. *Fast Girl* ranks 333rd in the category, *Pretty Good for a Girl* is not listed at all.[18] The number one book on the Running and Jogging list is Phil Knight's *Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike*, perhaps the ultimate story of American Dream-esque financial success through the sporting industry. Its position as the top text (it was published in 2016) sends a distinct signal about what stories are seen as admirable and important.

Kastor and Pappas' texts seek to *inspire*. Favor Hamilton's is a *recuperation* of reputation, *confession* of wrongdoing/misfortune and attempt to *inspire/educate* regarding mental illness. Heywood's text seeks to *expose/capture*. The texts that align the most with the performance storyline are the ones that sell because in a postfeminist, performance-oriented cultural sphere, inspiration and a focus on individual hard work as the path to achievement, sells (as Nike has proven).

Paratextual elements, defined by Gerard Genette as the zone of transaction between authors, publishers and readers, are important to consider when thinking about to whom a text is targeted as a product. Book covers act as paratextual materials that impact first impressions of the text as well as subsequent interpretation. As Smith and Watson phrase it, book covers make "an appeal for the book to be *read in certain ways*" (100 emphasis mine). The physical bodies of these athlete-authors first become visible through the book cover images.

In each of the book covers, the authors are emphatically coded as feminine through their dress and posing. *Pretty Good for a Girl*'s cover features a photo of the author shot from behind;

[18] As of May 6, 2021.

Heywood is shirtless, allowing the definition of the muscles of her back to be seen. She is wearing a necklace and earrings. *Fast Girl* features the silhouette of a woman reclining in a chair with bare legs and high heels, nodding to Favor Hamilton's highly publicized sex work with no sense at all that the book is about sport. *Let Your Mind Run* is the only text to present the author in running attire on the front cover, albeit with her hair down and a pink running kit that broadcasts her sponsor. Kastor is positioned on the side of a road within a mountainous landscape, seemingly positioning her at a training location, though she is not actively running. *Bravey* features Pappas on the cover dressed in a blue cocktail dress and high heels that are sport-sock inspired. Her arms are posed above her head to show both arm definition and her Olympic tattoo. In all of the texts except Kastor's, based on the cover image, without prior name recognition of the author-athlete, you would not be able to readily tell that these memoirs are about runners. This is slightly ironic, given that Kastor has the greatest name recognition as a runner of the group. All of the women are posed, while books about men who run almost always feature an action-shot on the front cover, and none feature men in non-running attire. The book covers, as paratextual material, contribute to the postfeminist sense of femininity as a bodily property.

The paratextual situation of the book covers connects the implied audience to the gender representation within the texts themselves. Throughout each of the memoirs, it is clear that the writers were exposed to ideas that being "an athlete" and being "a girl" are separate parts of their entity. Athleticism was presented to them in proximity to masculinity and therefore distanced from femininity. For example, Kastor's coach tells her "I'm going to develop you as an athlete, not as a girl" (59). While this is taken as a positive remark by Kastor, as it is the coach saying she will be training seriously with his male athletes, the underlying assumption is that to be

treated as a "girl" athlete would be lesser. Heywood's coach makes similar statements, telling the media "I want her to stop thinking like a girl runner...not that I want her to stop being a girl, but because I want her to work and think like an athlete. Right now she is just one of the guys" (1). This statement creates a differentiation between being a "girl runner" and a (real) "athlete." Kastor, Heywood, Favor Hamilton and Pappas all train with exclusively male groups at different periods in their careers, in the case of Favor Hamilton and Heywood this is explicitly explained as being a result of them being too fast for the other girls, and this is implicit in the experiences of Kastor and Pappas. In her study, Heinecken found that female athlete memoirists often "construct a myth of female exceptionalism rooted in association with and similarity to men" (332). While their athletic performances are associated with the realm of the masculine, when personal relationships are described in each memoir, for the most part, that of male partners, male coaches and fathers, far exceeds female friends, training partners, or mothers. And yet, each cover announces that this is a *girl* book, implicitly meant for a *girl* audience.

Furthermore, other than Kastor, the athletes specify the implied gender of their target audience with the texts themselves. In her mental health interludes, Favor Hamilton claims to be writing specifically to and for individuals with mental illness and their families, in particular new *mothers* who may be experiencing postpartum depression (111). Heywood writes at the very end of her memoir: "I write this book with hopes that other *girls* will have some of the support I didn't and won't make the same mistakes," which seems to gender the implied audience (220). Pappas writes the book to and for her "*Braveys*," a term she uses to describe her social media followers/fans. While "Bravey" is not explicitly gendered, -y and -ie suffixes are more frequently used to form diminutive nouns, which are directed at women much more frequently than men (think: sweetie, cutie, honey). Kastor never directly references an audience, which is significant

given that she is also the author who talks the least about the embodied experience of being a woman, and is also the best-known and highest performing athlete of the group.

Favor Hamilton, Kastor and Pappas also all have elements of their memoirs associated with the genre of self-help, a genre skewed towards a female audience and generically entrenched in postfeminist sensibility (Riley, Evans and Anderson 3). Pappas and Favor Hamilton directly address readers, telling them how they should learn from the experiences noted in the book. Kastor, while not engaging in direct address, includes resources like the titles of books she read and descriptions of journaling practices she undertook to improve her positive outlook, and the arc of the narrative is driven by the thesis that positive thinking is the key to athletic success. Critical research on the genre of self-help has identified "the recurring trope of an individualist ideal self" and continued promises of the opportunity to "be better" (Riley, Evans, Anderson 4). The individual ideal self that can constantly improve is also crucial to the performance narrative habitus and an accurate description of the postfeminist Alpha Girl. The focus on the individual as the source of solution/site of intervention tends to be at "the expense of seeking solutions in collective feminist or otherwise politicized activism" (Riley, Evans, Anderson 3).

Memoir is a social situation, and as Sparkes phrases it "a repository of cultural meanings." Jockographies put forth examples of how to be an athlete, how to understand athletic experiences and what sport stories are worth sharing. The gendering of these memoirs, in their paratextual surroundings uphold the notion of "athlete" and "girl athlete," where the life stories of male athletes are somehow legible to a general audience, but the life stories of women athletes are presented as targeted to other women. This has to do with the presumed male subject of the performance storyline.

Concluding Thoughts

In analysing these texts in search of trends within self-representation of professional/collegiate distance runners, a distinct difference emerges between the texts that present their Olympian protagonists as "somebodies" and those that participate in the phenomenon of the "nobody" memoir, despite the fact that all of the texts are predicated in the experience of "some [athletic] body." The Olympian memoirists, who seek to self-brand as "role models," engage most frequently in the manipulation of literary strategies to narrativize postfeminist discourse, demonstrating the extent to which a postfeminist sensibility has become intertwined with sport's performance narrative habitus, emphasising self-creation, individuality and sport-as-meritocracy.

In order to present themselves as athlete "somebodies" the Olympian memoirists must locate their "somebodiness" outside of the athletic body, through what Banet-Weiser calls "the postfeminist brand of femininity." That is, they document their journey to self-esteem, confidence and "empowerment" through memoir as an act of public self-disclosure, an act that Anita Harris deems "key in the process of self-actualization and achievement (in Dobson 35). This idea of public-self disclosure as key is reified by each Olympian author's emphasis on the self-narrative as both powerful and completely subjective, malleable, and utterly "up to you!"

The more closely a text aligns itself with a postfeminist performance storyline, the more commercially successful it is.

Despite memoir making up a significant portion of the running literature mediascape, those authored by women continue to represent a small minority (and within that small minority, the majority are white, able-bodied, heterosexual, women. This is due in part to the fact that through their paratextual and textual elements, women-authored memoirs are presented as

specifically for women audiences, whereas male-authored texts are depicted as appealing to universal audiences. Notwithstanding the fact that all of the texts analyzed in this chapter are explicitly or implicitly addressed to a female audience, each of the texts emphasizes heteronormative relationships and/or sporting success as associated with closeness to masculinity. Relationships with husbands, fathers and male coaches (often described as father figures) are emphasised as vital to sport experience. Gender norms are frequently emphasised.

The Olympian memoirs are adjacent to the self-help genre, often directly addressing the reader or saying explicitly what they hope their story will do. 'Self-help' represents a meritocratic ideal that individuals are in charge of their success and happiness and "can better themselves through education practices and tools of self-development" (Dobson 117). Conversely, Heywood's memoir, as the non-Olympian text at play, addresses sporting culture as that which needs amending, rather than the individual. The Olympian-authors structure their memoirs to end on a positive, "empowering" note, often located from a space of retirement and relocation in the nuclear family, versus the non-Olympian author structures the arc of her narrative to that of ambivalence, and being continually in dialogue with her physical body and trauma.

The athletes all have a sense of awareness of pressure to live up to the ideals of the postfeminist Alpha Girl/can-do girl, and the reflexivity to acknowledge that they may sometimes be "playing the part of the athlete." These disconnects are frequently dealt with through metaphors of fragmentation as a writing strategy (the narrating of the self as having multiple identities). Thematically, all the texts depict early exposure to intense performance-oriented ideology. I argue that the performance narrative habitus in sport and postfeminist ideology together craft a toxic pressure in young women athletes to try and be "perfect" both on and off

the track. The most commercially successful memoirs reject athletic talent as the basis of success, choosing to represent athletic success as a matter of hard-work, determination, and positive thinking.

Olympian and non-Olympian texts alike leave unquestioned the notion of the "runner's body" as a discursive construct, ultimately reifying ableist and fatphobic ideas of "good" and "bad" bodies that were intrinsic to the origins of women's running (Jutel, 1019). The "runner's body" is embedded in gendered norms of femininity as bodily property, ideas of gender appropriate sport, fetishized slenderness and the postfeminist "disciplined" or "self-surveilled" body that claims power from its sexual *subjectivity*. Instances of sexism are identified in all texts analyzed, but in the Olympian memoirs, solutions to sexism are located within the individual, and/or perpetrators of sexism are framed as singular individuals, rather than part of a misogynistic sport culture, taking feminism into account and reframing it within a discourse of individual responsibility.

As both the memoir boom and increasingly branded culture trends continue and more women have the opportunity to publish their life stories, it is imperative that we consider the consequences of what we do or do not talk about when we talk about running, how we talk about running, who is given a platform to talk about running–and to whom.

CHAPTER IV:

JUST DO IT, JUST *DREAM CRAZY*: ATHLETE REJECTION OF NIKE'S POSTFEMINISM

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And–which is more–you'll be a Man, my son!
- *Rudyard Kipling, "If"*

If you let me play [...]
I will be more likely to leave a man who beats me
- *Nike, "If you let me play"*

Introduction

When Nike's "Dream Crazier" commercial was released in February of 2019, I watched much of my online community celebrate the ad. "Dream Crazier" was part of a campaign that also included the notable "Dream Crazy" ad featuring NFL player Colin Kaepernick, known for his public protest of police brutality in the United States. While the video featuring Kaepernick (released in September 2018) incited widespread heated discussion, including disparaging comments from President Trump and other Republican politicians, and a trend of social media users posting videos of themselves destroying their Nike products, the company's stock rose by 5% in the weeks following the release of the ad and a year later the commercial won an Emmy Award. Compared to its predecessor, "Dream Crazier" received a widespread positive response. Its popular feminist message did not trigger any shoe burning or a presidential response, only #dreamcrazy and #justdoit trends on twitter.

I am, in many ways, part of the target audience, a mid-20s woman, active in competitive and recreational sport (and therefore a frequent purchaser of running shoes and athletic wear), who values women in sport. The ad bothered me the way that Oprah Winfrey's famous running quote, "Running is the greatest metaphor for life because you get out of it what you put into it," has always bothered me. As a collegiate runner trapped in an unforgiving cycle of injuries, at a certain point in time I, to use another overused but accurate sporting phrase, had put enormous amounts of "blood, sweat and tears" into the sport and it gave very little back to me. To my 20 year-old self, it seemed so unfair to perpetuate this myth that all it takes to be great is hard work or "wanting it," or perhaps … "dreaming crazy" enough.

Particularly in the aftermath of and ongoing conversation surrounding the #MeToo movement, including the entrance of the term 'gaslighting' into the vocabulary of many, it seemed to me that terms like "crazy," "hysterical," "unhinged," "delusional," and "irrational," were still too often being used against women to be reclaimed. I was reminded that when my collegiate coach argued to a convened meeting of Ontario university coaches that the women's teams should race the same distance as the men's teams, that the shorter distance for women is a relic of gender discrimination based on thinking women's uteruses would fall out if they ran too far, the loudest voice in the room was the one that said "*no one wants to stick around and watch the girls run another 2K*." I sat to the side as a notetaker while the 95% male meeting voted to keep the women's distance shorter. The lack of women in that room, the resulting collegiate athletes getting the implicit message that their races are secondary, didn't seem to be the result of women not "dreaming crazy" enough. It seemed more like men saying women's equality in sport was a "crazy," as in laughable, idea.

Having previously examined representations of women runners in fiction and in memoir, I now move to corporate-construction of these athletes, using the Nike "Dream Crazier" ad as a primary text. While I focus on this particular ad, Nike has a decades-long history of mobilizing post- and popular feminist ideology to popularize a certain type of feminist girl-subject.[19]

"Dream Crazier" is narrated by tennis champion Serena Williams (who also appears in the Kaepernick-narrated spot) and attempts to reclaim the term "crazy" with regard to women's ambition in sport. Reviewing milestones in women's sport, Williams narrates:

> A woman running a marathon was crazy, a woman boxing was crazy, a woman dunking? Crazy. Coaching an NBA team? Crazy. A woman competing in a hijab, changing her sport, landing a double core 1080 or winning 23 grand slams, having a baby and coming back for more? Crazy, crazy, crazy, crazy and crazy. So if they want to call you crazy, fine. Show them what crazy can do.

The end of the ad flashes, "It's only crazy until you do it [...] Just do it." Dream Crazier appears to acknowledge that women have been discriminated against and consistently underestimated and undervalued throughout the history of sport. Nike appears to be engaging in overt feminism—look at these amazing women in sport!

However, this seemingly successful Dream Crazier campaign was followed in May, 2019 by athletes Alysia Montaño and Allyson Felix publishing op-eds in the New York Times critiquing Nike's purported goal to get women to "dream crazy" by exposing the corporation's practice of halting pay to athletes during pregnancy. In November, arguably the most reverberating story came out, with former teenage phenom, Mary Cain, accusing the Nike Oregon Project (NOP) elite training group, Alberto Salazar and Nike of physical and emotional abuse. Her experience provoked a cascade of calls to #fixgirlssports, a very different set of public sharing than that of #dreamcrazy or #justdoit.

[19] See Cole and Hribar (1995), Helstein (2003), Goldman and Papson, Lucas (2000), Lafrance and Rail (2004), Grow (2006)

Cain's high profile revelations opened the floodgates, with almost weekly stories emerging of toxic cultures on elite, collegiate and even high school teams, particularly with regard to body shaming, encouragement of disordered eating practices and the prioritisation of performance objectives over athlete mental and physical wellness. Numerous athletes have also come forward regarding sexual abuse or harassment in programs, with the #metoo movement arriving in the sport of track and field. In Feb 2020, the Canadian running community was rocked by investigative journalism detailing allegations of the grooming and sexual abuse of a young athlete by well-known University of Guelph coach, Dave Scott-Thomas. With the sexual abuse allegations at the heart of the story, the fact that the women's team at Guelph was described by observers as "one big eating disorder" ruled by a "win-at-all-costs" mindset, took a secondary position. Megan Brown, the survivor, directly credits Cain coming forward as the inspiration to make her own story public. In the following month, 36 Wesleyan University XC/T&F alumni signed an open letter regarding the team culture, which included frequent "fat talks" and three athletes coached by John Rembao at the University of Arizona and the University of Texas filed a class action suit against the NCAA for failing to protect them, despite the schools' awareness of abuse allegations.

It is hard to imagine a more striking example of how the term "crazy" is still mobilised to gaslight women than the experience of Brown, who was abused by her running coach beginning at age seventeen. Brown says: "so many people wrote me off as a crazy athlete who was obsessed with her coach. In actuality, I was a teenager who was deeply traumatised by the situation my coach put me in" (quoted in Doyle np). And it was not Brown projecting that people were using the term "crazy" to describe her. In the *Globe and Mail*'s investigation into the events, multiple athletes contacted confirmed hearing stories regarding "Crazy Megan Brown."

This included fellow university coach, Steve Boyd, who says he was "told about a 'crazy' girl who had imagined that she had a sexual relationship with Dave and had made a scene about it. I believe I was told this so that I'd be armed with an alternative explanation, should I hear any rumours that suggested she was telling the truth" (quoted in Doyle np). Similarly, when Kara Goucher testified against Alberto Salazar in USADA's doping-related arbitration, Salazar's legal team "tried to smear her as the unstable spouse of Adam Goucher" (Hart 332). Framing women as "hysterical," "crazy," "delusional," etc, continues to be actively mobilised as a defence against reflecting on systemic cultural problems within sport.

Yet, amidst all of this, a record number of women qualified for the US Olympic Marathon Trials; 511 women made the time standard, compared to 260 men, which journalist Lindsay Crouse calls the "Shalane Flanagan Effect."[20] The numbers at the US Olympic Trials seem to scream that women's running has arrived and tell a tantalizing story of gender equity, of feminism no longer needed. Yet, the groundswell of dialogue regarding abuse, exploitation and dismissal within the sport suggests that communal, intersectional feminist action is imperative, and is being embraced by many athletes. Women's competitive running is at its most popular, and, seemingly, its most problematic (or, rather, its most willing to talk about issues within the sport). Rather than putting it down to more women "dreaming crazy," this chapter seeks to understand the contemporary moment in elite women's running as one in which athletes are pushing back against a system that Felix, Montaño and Cain describe as "built by, and for men."

Methodology

Why focus on a Nike advertisement? First, advertising is a medium that has grown exponentially over the last decade, and adapted itself to technological and cultural shifts,

[20] Flanagan won the New York City Marathon in 2017, making her the first American woman to win the race in forty years. Flanagan went viral for yelling "F*ck yes!" while running the last 20 metres of the race.

seamlessly ingratiating itself within the new reality of social media and prosumption.[21] Secondly, due to its aggregate and unconscious power, as Andi Ziesler states, "[advertising] will absolutely continue to play a crucial role in the ongoing project of gender equality" (27). Thirdly, Nike as a corporation has had far-reaching influence on the rise of empowerment discourse that hides postfeminist individualization practices and investment in neoliberal ideology under the guise of popular feminism. Nike also has extreme control over the broader running community as USATF's official sponsor. Journalist Matt Hart's framing regarding the atmosphere of the Olympic Trials, which are almost always held at Hayward Field, is an apt description also of the broader running industry: "This was Nike's track. This was Nike's sport. This was Nike's world" (285).[22]

To examine the underlying ideology regarding gender and sport in the Nike advertisements, I pay attention to how relations of power are both reaffirmed by the commercials' text/images and resisted by athlete responses. My analysis follows Fairclough's three dimensions of CDA, considering *text* (analysis of vocabulary choice, pronoun usage, vagueness in statements, and in this case because it is a video, the text/image combinations); *discursive practice* (analysis of the use of these linguistic strategies to interpellate users while occluding ongoing sexism in sport); and *sociocultural practice* (consideration of the broader ramifications of the ad).

In tandem with CDA, my approach is informed by Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding, which notes that 1) meaning is not simply fixed by the sender/producer (in

[21] The term 'prosumption' refers to the 'putting to work' of the consumer, blurring the lines between production and consumption. Prosumption predates the rise of Web 2.0 (for example, pumping your own gas, serving as your own teller at an ATM machine), but Web 2.0 created an environment of predominantly user-generated content (Ritzer and Jurgenson 19). Social media sites are "both the most prevalent location of prosumption and its most important facilitator as a 'means of prosumption' (Ritzer and Jurgenson 20).

[22] See also Fenton, Caela, "Communal and Corporate Transformation: Hayward Magic in the era of globalised sport culture," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 2021.

this case, the Nike marketing team); 2) messaging is *not transparent*; and 3) the audience/receiver is not a passive recipient of meaning, but rather an agent of exchange who decodes communication. CDA, which developed as an interdisciplinary methodology in the 90s (approximately two decades after Hall's field-defining essay for cultural studies), shares in particular this second assertion. Norman Fairclough has described the purpose of CDA as "systematically explor[ing] often *opaque* relationships of causality and determination between a) discursive practices, events and texts and b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts rise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power" (Fairclough 132) Struggles over power are at the heart of the second half of this chapter, in which I analyse the response of high profile women runners to the Dream Crazier commercial. Their decoding of the ad in an oppositional or "globally contrary" way rejects the "taken-for-grantedness" of Nike's projected feminism (Hall 172, Procter 68). The subsequent recoding of postfeminist discourse by these athletes challenges the motivations of Nike and the broader professional running industry's invocations of "feminism" and exposes ongoing systemic sexism.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Dream Crazier

"If *we* show emotion, *we're* called dramatic. If *we* dream of equal opportunity? *We're* delusional. When *we're* too good, there's something wrong with *us*. And if *we're* angry, *we're* 'hysterical,' 'irrational' or just 'being crazy;'" these first lines of Dream Crazier construct a sense of collectivity through the repetition of the pronoun *we* (my emphasis). The repeated communal *we* suggests a collective experience of all women. And while the lines are paired with images of athletes, the narration is intentionally vague—accusations of emotionality or being denied equal opportunity are hardly applicable solely in the sporting context.

However, the pronoun *we* is then replaced by the repetition of a singular noun, "*a* woman;" "*A* woman running a marathon was crazy, *a* woman boxing was crazy, *a* woman dunking, coaching an NBA team, competing in a hijab or winning 23 grand slams, having a baby and then coming back for more? Crazy, crazy, crazy, and crazy" (emphasis mine). The focus is now on each individual woman who was "crazy" enough to accomplish a sporting first. The singularity reinforces the neoliberal logic of pushing "beyond'" constraints, without identifying structures that create them in the first place.

This emphasis on singular exceptionalism rather than collectivity (the "we" or "us" has disappeared) is characteristic of postfeminist discourse. In 2007, Rosalind Gill characterized postfeminism as a "sensibility," one with themes including a shift from sexual objectification to subjectification; emphasis on self-discipline; focus on individualism/empowerment/choice; "resurgence of ideas about natural sex diference"; and an "alignment with the neoliberal psychological subject" (Gill 147). Revisiting the concept a decade later in 2017, Gill argues that postfeminism has now become hegemonic, operating as a gendered neoliberalism (606).

So what's the difference between postfeminism and "popular feminism," which is perhaps the more easily identifiable category that Dream Crazier circulates within, as Nike as a brand circulates within popular culture? Popular feminism emerges within the context of a postfeminist sensibility. While popular feminism recognizes the continued existence of gender inequality, it is not invested in disrupting either capitalism or mainstream politics, but is rather entrenched within "neoliberal principles of individualism and entrepreneurialism" (Banet-Weister 12). In this way, as Sarah Banet-Weiser aptly frames it, although postfeminism and popular feminism may appear to be in opposition, under the surface "they are actually mutually sustaining" (20). This is not to say that all visible forms of feminism within popular culture at the

contemporary moment are postfeminist at heart, but rather to acknowledge that much visible contemporary popular media "feminism," such as the Nike "Dream Crazier" commercial is, in reality, distinctly postfeminist in nature, replete with erasure of the intersectionality of experience in favour of discourse of exceptionalism (Gill 2016).

It is only in the final lines of the ad that the opposing team, so to speak, is acknowledged; "So if *they* want to call you crazy, then fine. Show *them* what crazy can do" (emphasis mine). There is now a vague pronoun reference to *they* and *them*—the non-believers in women, the unidentifiable mass to whom women must prove themselves, the ones who call them "crazy." The final statement makes it clear that the address is speaking to *you* (if you're a woman). The onus is now on you as a singular individual, to show this *them* what's up. Nike's engagement with feminist discourse can also be termed an example of "marketplace" feminism, that is, the "branding" of feminism as consumable identity (Ziesler 74). The directive to "show *them* what crazy can do" calls to the viewer to identify feminism as individual 'overcoming' or 'surpassing' rather than collective organizing and collaboration, as well as something that is accessible through relationship with a for-profit brand. The lack of specificity in reference to "they/them," however, means that no one is held accountable for systemic sexism within sport.

Since "Dream Crazier" consists of combined audio/visual, the selection of statements and images is important. When Williams narrates the lines "If we dream of equal *opportunity*, we're delusional," a clip of the USWNT plays, with a close up of soccer player Megan Rapinoe as the word "delusional" is spoken. The USWNT is famous for lobbying for equal pay to their male counterparts in professional soccer. By choosing to use those women to narrate "opportunity" rather than the specific structural discrepancy based on sex that they are protesting, it dilutes the acknowledgment of structural inequity built into sporting systems.

Similarly, when Williams narrates, "when we're *too good*, there's something *wrong with us*," a clip of South African middle-distance runner Caster Semenya plays. Semenya has been subjected to scrutiny, publicity, examination and "celebritization," her body put forth for analysis and critique perhaps more than any other athlete of our time (Schultz 285). To suggest that Semenya was forced to undergo invasive sex-testing solely because she was "*too good*" erases an complexly intersectional issue, one that requires attention to racism and imperialism, as well the including of queer and inter-sex perspectives (Nyong'o 95). Semenya was compelled to undergo gender verification tests as a teenager because of "her deep voice, muscular build and rapid improvements in time" and because of "suspicions" of her competition (Mahomed and Dhai 13). This is despite the fact that most international federations, including the IOC, had done away with gender-verification testing by 2000. The fact that the IOC retained the right to test athletes if their gender identity was thought to be "suspicious" results in the legitimation of "suspicion, speculation, and widespread surveillance of female athletes by scrutinising their perceived femininity" (Mahomed and Dhai)—and this femininity has long been rooted in heteronormative whiteness (Douglas) and a fear of female masculinity. Simplifying Semenya's experience to the idea that she is just "too talented," without attending to the complexities of her experience is feminism that is "visible because [it] does not challenge deep structures of inequities" (2018). It allows for the celebration of Semenya without addressing the system that continues to prevent her participation in professional track and field.

As previously noted, the "they" of dream crazier, the ones who are calling women "dramatic," "delusional," "unhinged" are an unnamed amorphous mass, which impedes any real critique. Visually, the only hint of who this 'they' might be occurs in the clip in which a female marathoner, (the grainest seemingly 'oldest footage in the commercial) yanks her arm from a

man who is seemingly trying to pull her off the course. She pulls away from him seemingly with relative ease. This is one of the only times a man is in view in the ad, and the only time it is hinted that this amorphous "they" might have something to do with men. This failure to name/identify is characteristic of postfeminist discourse. The old and grainy editing of the footage suggests that this behaviour of overt hostility towards womens' sport participation is a historical relic, something of the past.

And what does it mean for Nike to invoke the word "crazy," ostensibly as a positive characteristic or accomplishment? As the narrator, Williams says the word *crazy* twelve times in the course of the minute and thirty second advertisement, plus the word is flashed in the final text shot "It's only crazy until you do it," which is then shortened to Nike's tagline, "Just do it." Thirteen utterances in a minute and a half make "craziness" the clear rhetorical focus of the advertisement. By invoking this term, along with the related adjectives "dramatic," "hysterical," "unhinged," and "delusional," "irrational" Nike calls upon diction with a long history and continued use for the purpose of silencing women or dismissing their experience. In doing so, Nike seems to recognize how language is mobilised against women to silence them, or undermine their accomplishments. All of these terms have been proven to have gendered associations, but in particular, gendered associations with regard to mental health (Epting and Burchett 2019). The adjectives "unhinged," "delusional" and "irrational," are all terms associated with mental illness often mobilised in a derogatory way. In fact, many of these terms are now considered to be ableist, that is, language that targets individuals with a disability or impairment. Oftentimes, terminology that has a history of othering those with disabilities is used as synonymous for negative attributes or experiences.

"Craziness," "madness" and many of the other terms invoked in the ad have, in fact, been reclaimed by antipsychiatry and mental patient liberation communities. As Brenda Lefrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume put forth in their edited collection, *Mad Matters*, terms like the ones that Nike invokes have been reclaimed by these specific communities as a way of self-identifying: "once a reviled term that signalled the worst kinds of bigotry and abuse, madness has come to represent a critical alternative to "mental illness" or "disorder" as a way of naming and responding to emotional, spiritual, and neurodiversity" (10). Thus, Nike's use of "crazy" should also be framed by the ableist history of the term–unlike disabled or antipsychiatry communities, Nike is not actually claiming "craziness" as a bodymind experience.

Hysteria or being "hysterical" has a long history of being used to pathologize women. Hysteria, or "being hysterical" is currently most often used to suggest that someone is overreacting, getting disproportionately upset, or even imagining something that isn't real. For example, people who experience physical symptoms such as pain that are not obviously diagnosed/documented are frequently dismissed as being "hysterical" (Mollow 3). The term itself comes from the Latin *hystericu*s, which means 'of the womb' and thus its very etymology is associated specifically with the female body and anxiety around it. The word "lunatic" also has an etymology related to the female reproductive system—coming from the Latin *lunaticus*, or 'moon' and the belief that monthly periodic insanity could be triggered by the cycle of the moon. While hysteria no longer carries the connotation of "wandering of the womb," anxiety regarding the female reproductive system generally, but also specifically in sport, is ongoing (Kukla 10).

Oppressive terminology is sometimes reclaimed; that is not what is going on in Nike's commercials. Reclamation of a term must come from within a community itself and with appropriate acknowledgment and understanding of the term's mobilisation in the past.

Reclamation of a term happens on a community's own terms, not on the terms of a multi-billion dollar corporation run almost exclusively by men, who wish to mobilise it commercially. Given that the labels of being "crazy," "hysterical," "delusional" etc are still actively used to silence women—including women athletes, as the aftermath of the commercial so vividly demonstrates—and that there remains an institutional obsession (of which Nike is one of these institutions) with policing the female reproductive system in sport, and a disturbing lack of support for athlete mental health, particularly in women at the highest levels of sport, Nike's usage is an ahistorical occlusion rather than socio-politically invested reclamation. Rather than akin to the reclamation of "crip" or "queer," Nike's invocation of crazy may be better compared to recent popular feminism attempts to encourage women to identify as "bossy," or as a "girl boss." In this sense, there is an identification of the way women are often labelled as bossy, as opposed to men who exhibit similar behaviours, who might be labelled assertive or authoritative. Yet this term, like crazy a) does not address the ongoing way that women are treated, and b) relies on infantilization, or the "making cute" of a derogatory term, through the feminization of adding "girl" or "lady."

As further evidence that Nike has no business purporting itself as ground zero for reclamation of sexist terminology, in 2018, the company was served a class action lawsuit filed by former employees, alleging sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the form of pay discrepancies between men and women employees. The class action suit was filed in August, six months before Dream Crazier was released. Speaking after the release of the ad, Laura Salerno Owens, attorney for the class action, stated: "The way Nike marginalises women at its headquarters is completely contrary to how it portrays itself to its customers as valuing women in sports [...] To echo Nike's most recent ad campaign, we don't believe it's 'crazy' for women to

dream of equal pay for equal work" (Salpini np). Owens' scare-quoting of "crazy" emphasises not only that this is the rhetoric of Nike's ad, but also suggests that such language actually could be mobilised against women who are fighting for pay equity.

Like "crazy," it is also important to pay attention to the choice to invoke "dreaming." In the context of the commercial "dreaming" crazy means to have a goal so lofty that other people wouldn't even think to shoot for it; or, particularly if people think you "shouldn't," go for it! In this sense, dreaming functions in the same way as postfeminist confidence/empowerment discourses, which underline self-belief as the key ingredient that unlocks success. When found in advertisements, this marketplace feminism discourse is called "empowertising" or "femvertising" (Zeisler 29). For example, Covergirl's #GirlsCan, Always' #LikeAGirl, Dove's #RealBeauty, #FreeBeingMe and #SpeakBeautiful, all rely on a call to women to believe in themselves, practice self-love, to be confident in their bodies and beauty. Catherine Rottenberg sees these discourses as essential to neoliberal feminism in which self-described feminists are "shorn of all obligations to [...] those who are not 'strivers" (83). Confidence/empowerment discourse, to which I add "dreaming crazy:"

> ...do crucial cultural work, [...] women's continued inequality is acknowledged, a solution is proposed (namely, building confidence), and an entrepreneurial responsibility—and I would say positive—neoliberal subjectivity engendered. Drawing on these crucial insights, I maintain that the exhortation to confidence may need to be understood as part of a more complex address to young women, where confidence constitutes an affective modality and futurity the temporal orientation (Rottenberg 116).

Inequality is acknowledged, but it is the responsibility of the individual girl/woman to "dream crazier" than that inequality; confidence/empowerment discourses allow for the turning away from structural, systemic problems, or even collective experience of discrimination. "Show them what crazy can do" is an echo of Facebook Chief Operating Officer Cheryl Sandberg's call at the

end of her postfeminist manifesto, *Lean In,* which achieved great popularity in 2013: "it's up to us to end the self-fulfilling belief that women can't do this, women can't do that" (216). Like how *Lean In* has become a defining text of postfeminist thought presented as feminist in the corporate realm, so have Nike commercials in the realm of sport.

Dream Crazy Before Dream Crazier

Though I have presented a CDA analysis of Dream Crazier that unpacks the use of postfeminist discourse, it is important to note that the Dream Crazy ad starring Colin Kaepernick that precedes Dream Crazier uses many of the same strategies to interpellate a mixed-gender audience. The emphasis on the individual through pronoun choice and direct address, the deliberate vagueness of statements and of course the mobilisation of "crazy," are present in the advertisement. The use of crazy in this ad perhaps nullifies any argument that Nike could have been trying to reclaim the term specifically on behalf of women. It is in "Dream Crazy" that Kaepernick's scripted narration explicitly informs us that crazy is not an insult, but a compliment, as the commercial reads:

> If people say your dreams are crazy, if they laugh at what you think you can do, good. Because calling a dream crazy is not an insult, it's a compliment. Don't try to be the fastest in your school, be the fastest ever. Don't believe you have to be like anybody to be somebody. Don't become the best basketball player on the planet, be bigger than basketball. Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything. If you have only one hand, don't just watch football, play it. And if you're a girl from Compton, become the greatest athlete ever. Yeah, that's more like it. So don't ask if your dreams are crazy, ask if they're crazy enough.

Like in "Dream Crazier," we have the unspecified reference to "people" or "they," who are supposedly the detractors of the dreamers. The direct address of the narrator is to "you" with you/you're/your appearing seven times in the minute long spot. The direct address is imperative, a series of directives that orders the viewer to be not good, but great, implying that greatness has

no structural or access-related components, or even talent for that matter, but is rather a matter of believing in oneself and working hard enough.[23]

Most crucial in this advertisement however is the image/audio combination of Kaepernick himself appearing in the commercial. As an NFL player for the 49ers, Kaepernick became a broader household name in 2016 when he began kneeling during the American national anthem before games. Kneeling served as an act of protest intended to draw attention to systemic racism and in particular police violence against Black Americans. Kaepernick's actions inspired many fellow NFL players to follow suit, as well as players in other leagues, including Megan Rapinoe, who appears in Dream Crazier. Kaepernick's actions enraged then-presidential candidate Donald Trump, who encouraged his followers to boycott NFL games. The NFL went on to shun Kaepernick who, at the time of the release of Dream Crazy, had not played a game since the end of the 2016 season. This is to say that Colin Kaepernick is a figure of racial justice activism, and was strategically selected by Nike for the "Dream Crazy" campaign as such.

However, the same way that Nike goes through the entire Dream Crazier commercial without naming sexism (nevermind its intersections with racism, homophobia, ableism, etc) in the Dream Crazy commercial, racism is never addressed. Kaepernick's ousting from the NFL for his protest of police brutality is only alluded to as "Believ[ing] in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."

This practice of seeming to acknowledge inequality but never naming or depicting the structural, economic, political or cultural forces underlying this inequality is a strategy that Nike

[23] This emphasis on athletic 'overcoming' as 'post able-bodied' is widely examined within Disability Studies scholarship as relying on the "supercrip" narrative. Such stories are inspirational accounts of hyper-abled disabled people (such as the ones who make it to the NFL), that perpetuate the idea that disabled people should be able to individually conquer their disability. This type of narrative, which is particularly popular within sport, "reinforces the idea that disability is a problem intrinsic to disabled people themselves, rather than intrinsic to the matrix of problems that arise due to disabling architecture, policies, attitudes and a host of other factors" (Peers, 524).

has employed from its earliest advertisements (Goldman and Papson 94). As Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson note, "by calling attention to a ghostly aura of class and race [and in the case of Dream Crazier, gender], Nike both establishes itself as a 'realist' voice while at the same time representing sport as a vehicle for spiritually transcending race and class [and gender] divides" (94). Other than one limited edition shoe collaboration released in 2019, Nike has done little with its partnership with Kaepernick. And in 2019, less than 10% of Nike's 300 plus vice-presidents worldwide, were black (Nike Impact report FY2019). As is the case with Nike's releasing of a "feminist" advertisement while being at the center of a gender-discrimination lawsuit and with sexist policies in place to terminate athlete salaries upon pregnancy, the "Dream Crazy" ad with its vague allusion to racism is released while Nike has minimal numbers of Black employees in leadership positions.

Decoding and prosuming: Circulating craziness

Dream Crazy and Dream Crazier were released into a completely different advertising ecosystem than that of "If You Let Me Play," Nike's previous most celebrated "feminist ad."[24] It was released in print in 1992 and moved to television in 1995, but ran for years after. I have vivid memories of the commercial despite being an infant when it was released. If You Let Me Play reached its audience through print and TV, resulting in a less active exposure on the side of the consumer. Dream Crazy and Dream Crazier, on the other hand, are designed for dispersal

[24] "If You Let Me Play" was, at the time, the most award-winning ad that W&K produced for Nike (now displaced by "Dream Crazy"), winning "Best of Show" at the One Club for Art and Copy's One Show (1996) and the "Good TV" award from Advertising Women of New York (1997) and, according to Nike's women's advertising manager, generated more positive publicity for the brand than any previous ad (Grow 2008). As Sarah Banet-Weiser frames it, "If You Let Me Play" set the "standard for sentimental earnestness as a mode of address," and also "set the tone for popular feminism's marshalling of injury and capacity as fundamental discourses in an economy of visibility" (Banet Weiser 50). The ad features a diverse array of girls, each pleading directly to the camera "If you let me play sports…" followed by a recitation of facts regarding a lowered likelihood of breast cancer, greater chances of leaving an abusive relationship or preventing an unwanted pregnancy, and of course, an increase in self-confidence. Embedded in the very language of the ad is the asking of permission to play sports (Carty, Lucas, Rail and Lafrance). Precisely from whom the girls in the ad are asking permission from is unstated.

over social media in the Web 2.0 advertising world. Dream Crazier was released during the Oscars, an award show that many people follow live on social media, thus stepping right into a captive audience. In just one day, Dream Crazier received over 28 million views on Twitter. In the three days after the release, mentions of #justdoit were up by 2261% and the ad had been put in front of over 600 million people on the internet (Anušić np). Similarly, Nike's mentions spiked by 1678% in the three days following the Kaepernick commercial (Sangha np).

In the case of Dream Crazy and Dream Crazier, Nike's social-issues based marketing is the key to encouraging consumers to do the unpaid work of disseminating the ad, engaging in prosumption. The majority of consumer-led distribution happened on Twitter, with the nature of the site encouraging users to retweet or share the advertisement with their own commentary attached. As Barinderjit Sangha writes: "these posts often encourage others to engage with this artefact by conflating Nike consumption with protesting institutional violence" (np). Consumers shared this ad as a way to support Kaepernick's social justice goals, and yet the ad never names police violence or systemic racism. My critique here is not of Kaepernick, but rather of Nike's dilution of the targeted specificity of his activism into a euphemistic "ghostly aura." Sangha calls it a "tactical embodiment" of the Nike marketing strategy, which involves "engaging with Black popular culture to sell athletic wear," rather than a genuine investment in antiracism education or policy. Sharing the Kaepernick ad became a way to project a racial-justice oriented identity (an identity now conflated with being a Nike consumer) with the click of a button.

Just as the sharing of "Dream Crazy" became a device for projecting racial justice awareness whilst really only engaging with its ghostly aura, the sharing of "Dream Crazier" became a way to signpost a feminist identity—one now conflated with being a Nike consumer—while also only having to engage with sexism's ghostly aura.

However, prosumption also requires the active engagement of the consumer with the ad, providing the opportunity to alter meaning. As Laura Richards highlights in her analysis of Sport England's 2015 "This Girl Can" Campaign, when consumers view a piece of media, they deconstruct it, consciously or not, based on their personal experience; but as producers (ie through tweeting, posting or sharing) users of a platform also construct meaning. And when referring to a specific event, such as the "This Girl Can" advert in Richards' analysis, or the "Dream Crazier" commercial here, "the meaning of what is represented by that event is deconstructed (in the viewing and interpretation of it) and reconstructed (in the production of a new secondary text about it)" (Richards 759).

Prosumption in this fashion is a heightened example of Stuart Hall's theory of the encoding/decoding of communication. In this theory "the degrees of symmetry—that is the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange"—depend on the degrees of symmetry established between the positions of the "personifications," encoder-producer (Nike) and decoder-receiver (individual responding to the ad) (Hall 166). Symmetry between the intended encoding of the producer and the subsequent decoding by the consumer serve to "naturalise" codes/discourses (Hall 167). In this case, when Nike encodes a "feminist" message and it is decoded by consumers as such, the assertion that female empowerment is about "dreaming crazy"/overcoming/individual exceptionalism gains further currency within popular discourse.

The sharing of external content on one's own social media platforms, unless specified otherwise, tends to insinuate support. In the case of ad discourse, this is the acceptance of the "dominant-hegemonic position," which is when the viewer "decodes the messages in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded" (Hall 171). The viewer who then goes on to

share the ad is not only "operating inside the dominant code" of postfeminist logic, but further promulgating it as positive. While the vast majority of consumers shared the ad in celebration of its purported feminism, there were some pointed oppositional decodings of the Dream Crazier ad and *recoding* of the Dream Crazier discourse by professional, formerly-Nike sponsored athletes, highlighting such a discourse's erasure of issues of intersectionality and systemic discrimination. By the term "recoding," I mean that the athletes have not only decoded Nike's messaging in a contrary way, they are speaking directly back to it. Instead of coding feminism in sport as a matter of individualism and exceptionalism, these women code feminism in sport as a matter of collectivity and attention to specific positionality. Through rejection of this sporting postfeminist discourse that has risen in tandem with, and is inextricably linked to, increasing neoliberalization of sporting practice, these athletes are pushing to expand discourse of athletic identity and opportunities for inclusion.

Flipping the script: Alysia Montaño's recoding of Dream Crazier

The title of Alysia Montaño's May 2019 video op-ed in the *New York Times* reads: "Nike Told Me To Dream Crazy, Until I Wanted a Baby." The accompanying text to Montaño's op-ed urges readers to recognize that Nike's dedication to women athletes is "just advertising" (Crouse np). This hits the very crux of the issue, because what is the point of advertising? To sell. But Nike isn't selling running shoes or sports bras in Dream Crazier, it is selling the idea that successful, 'empowered' women wear Nike, and that, by extension, if you wear Nike, you too can be a "future girl," "can-do girl," or "alpha girl."[25]

[25] See also Kindlon, D. (2006) "Alpha girls: Understanding the new American girl and how she is changing the world" (New York, Rodale), Azzarito, Laura "Future Girls, transcendent femininities and new pedagogies: toward girls' hybrid bodies?" *Sport, Education and Society*, vol 15 no 3, August 2010, 261-275, Harris, Anita. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. Taylor and Francis, 2003.

The beginning of Montaño's video op-ed directly invokes the Nike Dream Crazier campaign by making use of similar camera angles, music, and even repeating the first lines:

> If we show emotion, we're called dramatic. If we want to play against men, we're nuts. If we dream of equal opportunity, we're delusional. And if we want to be an athlete and a mother, well that's just crazy. No, seriously, it's not a good idea. 'Believe in something' even if it means sacrificing everything. Like maybe your contract, your pay? Even if you have to watch them roll out an ad campaign praising women like you for taking a stand.

If the premise of Nike's intro lines was to reclaim adjectives that are mobilised against women, Montaño's break from Nike's script— "no seriously, it's not a good idea"— mirrors the gaslighting of the sport's industry. It is by invoking, seemingly accepting Nike's encoding, but then breaking to recode the ad's discourse of the Nike ad that Montaño exposes it as just that, just an ad. "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything" is a direct quote from the earlier Dream Crazy ad featuring Colin Kaepernick. The "everything" that Kaepernick gave up—an NFL career, his contract, his livelihood, his safety, and the something he stood for, an end to police brutality—are never mentioned in Dream Crazy.

If you had seen the Nike Dream Crazier commercial, then Montaño's ironic invocation of the first few lines, leaves it pretty clear who the "them" was that rolled out an ad campaign praising women for taking a stand, while systematically undermining their ability to make autonomous decisions. But, in case some viewers didn't pick up on that, Montaño directly names Nike, then Asics, the US Olympic Committee, and the sporting industry as a whole. As Angela McRobbie notes, angry or overt critique is "taboo"—in a postfeminist culture, the solution must come from within women themselves (by *dreaming crazy*) (340). Montaño not only names names and identifies systemic inequity, she breaks with postfeminist and most popular feminist rhetoric—she looks right at the camera and says that when Nike and then Asics threatened to stop paying her— "I was pissed."

At the end of the op-ed, the Nike Dream Crazier music and tone reappears, a pastiche effect in which Montaño harnesses certain elements of Nike's language in her own recoded version of the ad. She says:

> If they try to dismiss your pregnancy, if they call it a distraction, or an injury, remind them what they told us, that great athletes never back down, that great athletes push the limits both on and off the track. Because that's the warrior spirit that packs stadiums and sells sneakers. We're the ones who decide what dreams are crazy and what dreams make perfect sense. And we're the ones to tell our daughters the difference between dreams and advertising. Who knows, maybe being a mother and a champion was a crazy dream, but it didn't have to be. So come on Nike, when are you going to start dreaming crazy?

Now the invocation of the pronoun "they" has a referent—Nike, Asics, other sports brands, the sporting industry generally. "Us" can be interpreted not just as women, but anyone such advertising has reached, in which the ideals of sport are put forth as simply a matter of hard work and determination. Instead of ending with "you" as a referent to the individual who now must take on sole responsibility for their own success, as Dream Crazier does, Montaño ends with "you" in reference to Nike, asking when the corporation is going to start "dreaming crazy" enough to make accessible for athletes dreams that might currently feel unattainable not through lack of grit or determination, but access to resources like childcare, maternity leave, health insurance.

Montaño's use of the term "crazy" is to respond directly to Nike's advertisement by making use of its own language. Montaño uses the term "crazy" six times in a five and a half minute video op-ed, whereas the Dream Crazier ad uses it nine times in a minute and a half long ad, suggesting that she isn't trying to put emphasis on reclaiming the word. As previously mentioned, Montaño's first invocation of "crazy" is her break from imitating Nike's music and tone—and recoding: "And if we want to be an athlete and a mother, well that's just crazy. No, seriously, it's not a good idea." This use of crazy reverts to the use of the adjective as describing

something that women really shouldn't do. This stands for her second use of the term as well, when she asks and answers: "Pro sports and motherhood? That's just crazy." Montaño then does not use the term for the bulk of her own testimony, suggesting that she has no personal investment in referring to herself as "crazy."

The term is only returned to in direct reference to Nike with the lines: "So when companies like Nike tell us to dream crazy, we say how about you stop treating our pregnancies like injuries? Then they tell us to believe in something and we say how about maternity leave? How about when you tell my daughter she can do anything, you back it up?" With this series of rhetorical questions, Montaño exposes "dream crazy," along with the call to "believe in something" or the assertion that "[you] can do anything" are empty signifiers. Gill and Orgard call these "inspirational aphorisms;" other examples include "dance like no one is watching," and "love like you've never been hurt." Such aphorisms are tied up in "feeling rules"—the requirement to be upbeat and determined, rather than angry or resenting and thus allow for "a general atmosphere of assertiveness and positive mental attitude" or even "vaguely defiant self-belief," which certainly comes through in Dream Crazier. These aphorisms displace any real politics or analysis. Yet, the emptiness of inspirational aphorisms is highlighted when coupled with tangible objectives, as Montaño does—how about not discriminating against pregnant athletes, how about offering maternity leave?

Montaño also recodes to reject the use of "crazy" as a synonym for outlandish or unrealistic without consideration of the systems that render goals as such. Stating "we're the ones who decide what dreams are crazy and what dreams make perfect sense" calls attention to the fact that it is often systems that render goals inaccessible, rather than their outlandishness. Almost every barrier broken by women who supposedly "dreamt crazy" would have been seen as

making “perfect sense” if sports hadn’t consistently excluded and marginalised women. Finally, by ending the op-ed by asking Nike, “when are you going to start dreaming crazy?” flips the script of individual responsibility, with the “you” now referring not to an individual, but to a multi-billion dollar corporation, one that stands in for the sports industry as a whole.

Still Hysterical: Unruly bodies in contemporary running

When Montaño competed in the 800m at the USA Track and Field Championships in 2014, overnight she became “The Pregnant Runner,” referred to as such in headlines rather than her own name, despite being a multi-time Olympian. Running professionally while visibly pregnant (Montaño was 8 months along) was unheard of at the time. There is a long history of assumption that exercise is harmful while pregnant, which only really started to transition for the average woman (read: non-professional athlete) in 2000. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists released their first guidelines for prenatal physical activity in 1985; these guidelines cautioned against running and recommended low-impact exercise lasting no more than 15 minutes at a time (Symons Downs et al 485). These guidelines were revised in 1994 to remove restrictions on activities and durations (Ibid). But, it wasn’t until 2000 that there was a pivot in recommendations, with the College now encouraging 30 minutes of moderate activity most days.

The IOC convened its first panel on pregnancy in elite athletes in 2014—after Montaño’s performance at USA champs. Citing a dearth of publication on the topic, the group found that. “profound anatomical and physiological changes accompany but there are few reasons that pregnancy should preclude healthy women from exercise” (Schultz). This lack of research on pregnant women and exercise (and in particular intense exercise) is part of the systemic gender bias that exists in exercise and sport science, in which most studies are carried out on men and

findings are assumed to be applicable to women as well. Or, as Stacy T Sims says her lab explained it to her as an undergrad: "women are an anomaly, so we don't necessarily study women in sport and exercise science" (Sims np). The physiological differences of women, particularly those regarding the reproductive system, including menstrual cycles, hormones and pregnancy have both the strongest history of being used as "scientific" reasons for the exclusion of women from sport, and, ironically, make up a palpable research gap in scientific literature.

In fact, the "diagnosis" of hysteria and the original reasoning for precluding women from sport are almost identical. In 1898, the German Journal of Physical Education asserted that "violent movements of the body" (such as those involved in sport) "can cause a shift in the position and loosening of the uterus as well as prolapse and bleeding, with resulting sterility, thus defeating a woman's true purpose in life, ie the bringing forth of strong children" (Schultz 17). Seemingly, running fast, jumping high, etc, could also cause the "wandering of the womb," hysteria's original diagnostic description. By 1921, wandering wombs were no longer cited, but rather that women have a finite amount of "vital and nervous energy" to draw from in pregnancy and motherhood, meaning that if "the foolish virgin uses up this deposit in daily expenditures on the hockey field or tennis court, as a boy can afford to, then she is left bankrupt in her crisis and her children have to pay the bill" (18). Rather than hysteric, women who want to play are just foolish.

Nowadays, consistent exercise is encouraged for most pregnant women. In an article from 2000 a group of exercise physiologists wrote: "For much of recent history, pregnant women were treated as if they had an illness and were subjected to a state of confinement [...] Today, a significant number of women are active and want to maintain a vigorous exercise program" (Hammer et al 1). In 2000, these scientists framed the characterization of pregnancy as an

"illness" as a relic of the past. Yet, as Montaño's op-ed highlighted, for professional athletes, women who are extraordinarily accustomed to exercise, pregnancy is characterised as an injury by their sponsors. For professional athletes, injury is that which one must actively avoid and proactively prevent. There is no sport in which injury, particularly during training, is a positive. The definition of injury is a "hurt or loss caused to or sustained by a person or thing; harm, detriment." This is not typically how most women would describe a wanted pregnancy. Thus, by treating pregnancy as akin to injury on a language-level within contracts, sport corporations automatically characterise it as something athletes should actively avoid. This isn't to say that pregnancy isn't an intense embodied experience and physical transformation. But there is a vast understanding in sport that not all physiological changes are injurious (ie the gaining of muscle mass). To automatically classify pregnancy as such places the choice to get pregnant as akin to "choosing" to have a stress fracture or tear an ACL. Thus, over the course of a century or so, women went from being "bad (potential) mothers" for exerting themselves at all because it threatened their reproductive organs, to being "bad (future) mothers" for exercising during pregnancy, to being "bad athletes" for choosing to have a baby mid-career.

The characterization of pregnancy as injury, rather than as a factor of difference between male and female biology, is also not without precedent. Menstruation also has a history of being classified as injury, with Dr. Stephen Westmann stating in 1939 that "no sportsman would ever dream of competing with a wound in his vital organs" (Schultz 19). To menstruate is to be wounded, to be pregnant is to be injured...these classifications cement the male body as the "norm" and the female body as aberrant and inherently prone to weakness. And while we may now scoff at the idea of menstruation being construed as a "wound," training programs and athletic progression are still invested in the norm of the male body, often to the long term

detriment of female athletes. As Mary Cain's Nov 2019 video op-ed attests, there remains a contemporary obsession with women's bodies in the running world, often focused on the maintaining of an underweight pre-pubescent-like body. When Cain arrived at the elite Nike Oregon Project training group, she says that "an all male staff became convinced that in order for me to get better, I had to become thinner, and thinner, and thinner" (Cain np). The loss of a menstrual cycle is one of the key indicators that a woman's body is not getting adequate nutrition and heightens long-term injury risk and threatens reproductive health, including the ability to become pregnant. Chronic underfuelling and emotional abuse left Cain depressed, with suicidal thoughts and driven to self-harm, the latter of which was actively ignored by coaches and staff. Despite months prior indulging in an ad campaign that celebrated the term "crazy" as a feminist battle cry, the highest levels of Nike coaching proved indifferent and, in fact hostile towards, an athlete mental health crisis that was in large part induced through an obsession with controlling the female body.

Counterintuitively, at the same time that professional athletes are being told their pregnancies are akin to injuries, broader society has never been more obsessed with the surveillance and exultation of the pregnant body and "having it all" motherhood. In her book *Mass Hysteria: Medicine, Culture and Mother's Bodies*, Rebecca Kukla argues that the "insertion and transformation of the maternal body into public space" leads to the splitting of this body into two. On the one hand, there is the unruly maternal body—porous, craving, unbounded and in need of policing, monitoring and regulation. On the other hand, there is the fetishized maternal body—the "natural state of unity with child" and in need of protection to preserve its purity (Kukla 67). In late modernity, the maternal body is always both unruly and fetishized, both in ways that are heightened by the influence of postfeminist ideology on maternity.

Pregnant bodies are more unruly than ever in Kukla's sense in that they are a) subject to more medical surveillance than ever before; b) there is more emphasis than ever on the pregnant woman's exertion of self-control and responsibility to self-police all potential threats to the fetus, and c) there is more pressure on women than ever to "snap back" from pregnancy—returning as fast as possible to pre-baby levels of professional workload and household workload, as well as a pre-baby physique. According to Dworkin and Wachs, contemporary motherhood now often includes not only a first shift of professional labour and a second shift of household labour and childcare, but also a third shift of body work to prevent "letting oneself go," which would be akin to failed womanhood and motherhood (28). Anxiety about weight gain during pregnancy now results in approximately 20% of pregnant women exhibiting disordered eating practices (Dworkin and Wachs 29). The fetishized maternal body is not only this 'snapped back' post-baby bod, but also the phenomenon of "pregnant beauty" defined by Imogen Tyler as the "reconfigu[ring of] maternity as neoliberal femininity" which "combines signifiers of (sexual) freedom, consumption, choice, agency and futurity in a powerful and seductive postfeminist ideal" (23). What does this mean for women whose first shift is also body work, i.e. athletics?

When high-profile runner Kara Goucher got pregnant while a member of the Nike Oregon Project, Nike suspended her pay, citing a "medical condition" (Hart 218). The use of the terminology "medical condition" as a euphemism allowed Nike to dance around the fact that they were suspending Goucher's pay in response to her pregnancy. She was also told that she would "owe" Nike back the time through a contract extension, despite the fact that her contract made no mention of any penalty for pregnancy. At the same time, Nike had the Gouchers keep the pregnancy a secret so that it could be announced in a *New York Times* article on Mother's Day in 2010. Thus, Goucher's maternal body was both deemed unruly/unworthy and fetishized

by the same sponsor. The article, titled "A Friendship Built for Long Distance" announced the pregnancies of Goucher and British runner, Paula Radcliffe. The piece was feel-good and aspirational, chronicling Goucher and Radcliffe's continued high level training and supportive friendship. Goucher's popularity in particular escalated after the announcement of her supposedly Nike-supported pregnancy, appealing to women who now make up more than 60% of all road race participants (Hart 220). Through this PR step, Nike betrays the superficiality of its commitment to Goucher, using her image and pregnancy to virtue signal its support of women and in particular "can-do" feminism while simultaneously suspending Goucher's salary.

As feminist scholars have noted, it's a particular type of maternal body and pregnancy experience that is most often fetishized—that of white, heterosexual, married women. Or as Tyler phrases it, "white, tight, youthful bodies with social capital and appropriate aspiration" (27). When 9-time Olympic medallist Allyson Felix spoke out in her own video op-ed less than two weeks after Montaño, she highlighted the intersectional issues of maternal health. Despite being one of the most decorated women in the history of track and field, Nike offered Felix 70% less pay after she became a mother. Speaking of her own pregnancy experience she noted: "I was not aware I was at a higher risk to have complications during birth. African American women are 4 times more likely to die in childbirth and twice as likely to have complications. And that's exactly what happened to me" (Felix np). By returning to systemic discrimination and in this case systemic racism within medical access and care for women of colour, Felix also explicitly returns to the politics that aspirational euphemisms like "dream crazy" leave out. Not only was she, one of the most successful Olympians in the sport, discriminated against for deciding to have children, she also faced further barriers in maternity as a Black woman. Ironically Felix, who refused to accept a Nike contract that didn't protect her and other women, originally signed

with Nike because the company sold her on its progressive values. Specifically, Felix was swayed by the Girl Effect Initiative; in 2010, Nike leadership assured Felix that by signing with Nike, she would be contributing to the global empowerment of women and girls.[26]

Nike's treatment of Black women's pregnancy makes Serena Williams' involvement in "Dream Crazier" noteworthy. Firstly, it is important to note that just because Williams narrates "Dream Crazier," it does not necessarily mean that the ad discourse is aligned with her personal beliefs. Following media and intersectionality scholar Dayna Chatman's argument surrounding Beyoncé, that the singer is an example of media and large corporation's interpellation of "*certain* Black women" as postfeminist subjects, I argue that Serena William's narration of Dream Crazier is an example of Nike's co-optation of Williams as a postfeminist role model (Chatman 930). This is not to say that Beyoncé's feminism should be ignored, but is rather a call to consider the ways that successful Black women are framed (and sometimes frame themselves) through postfeminist discourse and marketplace feminism. Returning to the stage 5 months after giving birth, Beyoncé was lauded for getting "back to business" (Chatman 927). But getting back to business for the musician largely surrounded a return to a pre-pregnancy body, as Beyoncé's brand of 'bootylicious feminism' is "enacted through the display and celebration of [the body]" (Chatman 932). Beyoncé's 'bounce back' feminism relies on a depoliticized empowerment narrative in which women have unlimited potential to achieve what they want through hard work. Like Beyoncé, Williams is scripted as having gotten "back to business," in "Dream

[26] Nike's abuse of outsourced labour in the Global South consisting primarily of poor, racialized women aged 18-24 was continuously in the public eye in the 90s and early 2000s (Moeller 13). Nike responded to criticism by opening its Corporate Social Responsibility department in 1998 and in 2005, announcing that the Nike Foundation would focus on adolescent girls, with the goal of educating the world on what it called "The Girl Effect," a branded theory of development created by an in-house Nike team and Wieden and Kennedy. The Girl Effect brought postfeminism to development discourse, couched in terms of neoliberal 'girl power.' Development scholars have termed The Girl Effect as paradigmatic of "post-feminist spectatorship" in which development ideology is divorced from a narrative of ethics and characterized as apolitical, fosters a breakdown of solidarity in women from the Global North and South, and takes a neoliberal market-based approach in place of a movement for gender justice (Calkin 656).

Crazier" narrating that she "c[ame] back for more" post-partum, returning to professional tennis five months after giving birth. Like Felix, as a fellow Black woman, Williams also had a difficult birth and was bedridden for 6-weeks after an emergency C-section and blood clotting, yet her return to sport is framed by Nike in Dream Crazier as deciding to "come back for more."[27]

Just as Kaepernick was a strategic narrator choice for Dream Crazy, Williams is a strategic choice by Nike to narrate Dream Crazier. Jayne O Ifekwunigwe writes that "the tennis legend and Black popular culture icon Serena Williams walks the line between hypervisibility and invisibility" (122). This hypervisibility/invisibility is part of the navigation of adoption, internalization, negotiation, and challenging of hegemonic postfeminist conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality that nonwhite and queer women face. Williams is hypervisible as a Black woman in a largely white sport. She is also hypervisible as a reigning champion. Yet her popular visibility in the sport often relies on the rendering invisible by sponsors the systemic racism and sexism of that sport in favour of what Nancy Spencer deems "ghetto to US open final narratives" and that presents her success (and consequently, that of any racialized girl) as a matter of "dreaming crazy."

Gwen Berry, the US hammer thrower who was put on probation by the IOC for raising her fist on the podium of the 2019 Pan Am Games in protest of racial injustice, points to this same phenomenon in her own experience that Nancy Spencer suggests is pushed onto Williams. Berry states, also in a video op-ed published by the *NYT*: "The IOC loves the stories. They want

[27] Yet, while Williams' performance had 'bounced back', much more media attention was directed to her postpartum physical appearance, the misogyny of which is, of course, not noted in Dream Crazier. In particular, the media picked apart her "catsuit, worn at the 2018 French Open, sexualizing the athlete for her outfit choice and using it as an opportunity to return to frequent disparagement of her 'masculine' musculature. All of this is despite the fact that the suit was designed to help reduce the risk of blood clots, something Williams faced in the aftermath of giving birth to her daughter. See Shultz for details on previous outfits of Williams: "Reading the Catsuit: Serena Williams and the Production of Blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open," *Journal of sport and social issues*, 2005-08, Vol.29 (3), p.338-357

to pitch, oh well this athlete grew up without a father, this athlete grew up in the ghetto, this athlete had to go without food for months. But [...] you can't talk about racial discrimination in Black and brown neighbourhoods, oh that's not for you to talk about" (Berry np). The policing of narratives to allow for only those of "overcoming," allow for sport to be couched as "post-racial," "post-sexist," "post-ablebodied," etc.

Montaño, Goucher, Felix and Cain's testimony, along with the class action lawsuit by former Nike employees and Nike employee walkouts in support of Mary Cain (Dec 9 2019—when Nike was set to reopen the newly renovated Alberto Salazar building) and in protest of racism (Aug. 2020) prove that the representation within Dream Crazier and the lived experience of Nike athletes and employees is divergent. Mary Cain, who joined the Nike Oregon project at age 17, "joined Nike because [she] wanted to be the best female athlete ever." This goal is everything that 'dream crazy' rhetoric puts forth as possible. But Cain's testimony continues: "Instead, I was emotionally and physically abused by a system designed by Alberto [Salazar] and endorsed by Nike." In particular, Cain highlights that her experience could have been different had Nike, a corporation that is "all powerful" within the sport of track and field, "controlling the top coaches, athletes, races and even the governing body," done work to address its culture of systemic sexism. Yet, almost the exact same phrasing is used by Montaño, Felix and Cain—that the world of track and field is made by and for men.

Montaño, Felix, Cain, And Berry's *New York Times* stories were all done in collaboration with journalist/film producer Lindsay Crouse. Crouse herself was one of the 511 women to qualify for the US Olympic Marathon Trials and she frequently writes about the intersection of gender and sport. All of the pieces were published in the Opinion section of the *NYT*, not the sports section. This is to say that, of course, these texts that are providing voice to athlete

experiences are not themselves unmediated, unscripted, or unproduced in contrast to advertisements like “Dream Crazy” and “Dream Crazier.”

Concluding thoughts: Calls to #fixgirlssports versus calls to rebuild sport

The 2020s will continue to be an urgent period to address structural inequities in the sport of running. A key way of doing that is contrary decoding and politically-invested recoding of post- and popular feminist discourse that has been pushed through advertising campaigns for decades by sport corporations like Nike. “Dream Crazy” is simply the latest in the brand’s history of feeding femvertising and empowertising trends that hide postfeminist individualization practices (it’s all on you to transcend!) and investment in neoliberal ideology, under the guise of popular “dream big,” “love yourself,” “lean in,” “just do it” feminism.

This emphasis on the self glosses over bias within the sport, including but not limited to, pay inequity, emotional and physical abuse, discrimination against pregnancy, systemic racism, investment in the upholding of both gender and sex binaries, the centring of ablebodiness and more. Yet, advertisements like the Dream Crazier campaign allow brands to reap the benefits of appearing socially conscious through their willingness to engage superficially with the “ghostly aura” of such issues. Athlete activism and public testimony, such as that of Alysia Montaño, Allyson Felix, Kara Goucher, Mary Cain, Gwen Berry and many others, that specifically targets ‘Dream Crazy’ discourse and recodes it in a globally contrary manner, is essential to recentring intersectional feminism.

Montaño’s testimony unleashed a groundswell of public revelations of similar experiences, or acknowledgement of the sport-wide issue by other professional runners, including Emma Coburn, Aisha Praught-Leer, Lauren Fleshman and Phoebe Wright. In the days after Montaño’s op-ed, brands including Altra, Brooks, Burton and Nuun announced that they

would put into effect contractual guarantees for sponsored athletes who get pregnant (West np). A congressional inquiry was also sent to Nike by the co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus of Maternity Care. The letter pointedly asked "how many times Nike has paused or ceased sponsorship for pregnant female athletes or male athletes when they become fathers?" (ibid). Including the question as to whether the policy is applied the same way to men not only underlines the discriminatory factor, but also hints at the fact that becoming a parent is not something that only impacts women. Two weeks after Montaño's op-ed and two days after Felix's, Nike announced that it would "waive" performance-pay reductions for 12 months; in August, continuing to face public backlash over maternity leave, and in particularly revelations of their policy immediately after a "feminist" ad campaign, Nike extended that waiver to 18-months.

In the aftermath of Cain's testimony, the hashtag #fixgirlssports emerged on Twitter, in many ways symbolic of a recoding of #justdoit or #dreamcrazy, suggesting instead that real systemic barriers exist for girls in sport—ones that make it difficult for them to "just do it," or get in their way even if they have a "crazy dream."

The hashtag itself hangs onto some of the problematic language prevalent in post- and popular feminism. The choice of the term "girls' sports," rather than women's sports means that this critique remains somewhat confined to the "safer" zone of girlhood—as per Nike's "If You Let Me Play"—allowing for a more paternalistic stance. Women in sport are more likely to be referred to as "girls" than men in sport are likely to be referred to as "boys" (Cambridge 9). The greater issue with framing of the hashtag is that it makes it seem like "girls' sports" are the broken thing, rather than recognizing that the system was never designed for girls and women, but always already designed for men. In this respect, I turn to Lauren Fleshman's take on the

recent outcry by professional and recreational runners alike, which I think more accurately captures the spirit behind the hashtag (while recoding the language of "If You Let Me Play"): "Women and girls are no longer content just to have a chance to play, we are demanding sports be rebuilt altogether" (np). Though the world of running cannot be fixed on social media alone, this chapter demonstrates that social media sites are both a landscape of proliferation of dominant discourses of marketplace postfeminism and of activism that seeks an inclusive and equitable version of sport.

CHAPTER V:

#VERYFUNJOB: INSTAGRAM AND ATHLETIC IDENTITY IN WOMEN OLYMPIC RUNNERS

> "Female athletes were once oddities, goddesses, or monsters, exceptions to every social rule. Now the female athlete is an institution."
>
> – Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin, *Built to win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon*

Introduction

I am part of a strange generation that grew up with the internet, and for whom social media emerged around teenagehood. That is to say I've watched and lived the experience of social media becoming the location of personal storytelling, a form of digital memoir. This transition also started to mean that photographs became a part of the reason that you did things, or went places, numbers of likes impacted how important you felt. For me, it also meant that I started to refuse to have my photo taken unless I was prepared and "camera ready" for fear that photos would be posted where I didn't look my "best."

Reading Kate Fagan's *ESPN* article, "Split Image" (2015) and subsequent book, *What Made Maddy Run* (2017), in which she tells the story of Madison Holleran, a University of Pennsylvania student and track athlete who committed suicide in 2014, was one of the first times I saw a running-specific text start to grapple with the underbelly of social media, especially for young women, as it intersects with sport culture. In Madison Holleran, I saw myself and many of my friends and teammates who were trying, like Suzy Favor Hamilton said in a prior generation, "to be perfect," but we were going to do it online too.

When I first started using Facebook and then Instagram, it was mostly for following people you actually knew in "real life." Influencer and celebrity culture hadn't begun to control social media yet. Now, like many sports fans, social media, and in particular Instagram, is one of the ways that I keep up with athletes I admire. But, even if I think of myself as becoming an increasingly critical consumer of media compared to my high school or undergraduate self, time on Instagram serves as a (conscious and subconscious) daily dose of projected ideas about what it means to be a runner, a woman, a woman runner, what's considered attractive, what I should buy, how I should act, for me and for users like me.

In this chapter, I focus on the self-representation of competitive women distance runners via the social media platform, Instagram. The purpose of this chapter is not just to explore trends in *how* women runners self-represent on Instagram, but to consider *why* such self-representation focuses heavily on physical appearance/body capital, is determinedly upbeat in tone, and cultivates an identity focused on athletics. This is done by following Elias et al's imperative to "consider the social, economic, and technological processes" influencing self-representation, as well as investigating "the different forms of *work* involved in presenting the self" (5, emphasis mine). Through my case study, I advance the emerging field of inquiry into digital cultural studies of physical culture by focusing on the pointedly gendered elements of self-branding and self-promotion of competitive runners—a sport with its own gendered norms that are in constant interaction with broader social norms.

Competitive women runners engage in what Kim Toffoletti and Holly Thorpe term the "athletic labour of femininity" through their self-representation via Instagram, presenting themselves as "pretty and powerful" athlete-*brands*. This is done through the leveraging of body capital, the perpetuation of a constantly upbeat, excited tone and the curation of an athletics-

focused identity, as opposed to a holistic one. I argue that this trend in representation occurs in response to contemporary brand culture and celebration of the postfeminist "Can-Do," girl, the one who is "perfect," and in the context of postfeminist digital cultures in which women face contradictory pressures "to tell and show the self and body as heterosexy, but no sexualized, and confident, independent, 'authentic' and 'transparent,' but not narcissistic; markedly visible and exposed in very specific and contradictory ways" (Dobson 15). As Pamela Creedon phrases it: "In our digital media age, sport has become a global microcosm communicating gender values," and the sport of distance running is imbricated in specific ways (714). In an already fraught economic situation, social media has further altered the landscape of sponsorship in competitive running–it no longer matters solely how fast you run, but also how marketable you are as a *brand*. Women runners in particular face both cultural and economic pressures to enact a postfeminist athlete brand online.

This chapter contributes to the emerging field of scholarship on physical culture and social media, and enhances methodological options for other researchers by serving as a model for tracking, examining, and understanding Instagram posts as "both image-based and intertextual content" (Highfield and Leaver). I put forth that not only is the examination of visual representations of athletic identity on social media important, but that examining sport-specific athlete-output is key. Distance-running, like all sports, has specific cultural narratives and norms that intersect in particular ways with broader on- and offline culture. Distance-running athlete profiles translate more easily to "lifestyle" and "fitness" focused followers than many sports, due to the popularity of running as a fitness activity. Both distance-running culture and broader society tend to fetishize thinness. Relatedly, women runners often compete in sports bra and briefs race kits that place their competition-wear closer to the arena of "fitspo" than, say, the

uniforms worn by basketball, soccer, hockey, martial arts, etc. Women distance runners face less social stigmatisation online compared to other sports, particularly those competing in contact sports and others that are often perceived as challenging gender stereotypes. Women's distance running, in Canada and the USA, has historically been and continues to function as a predominantly white space (Ariail 15). For these reasons and more, women distance runners are idealised "pretty and powerful" athletic subjects that are highly marketable in a neoliberal postfeminist media space, and the findings regarding the output of these athletes should not be generalised across all women's sports.

Contextualising Sport & SNS

From #fitspo and fitness influencers to the sport-media-commercial-complex, from the increasing celebritization of and access to athletes, to the accessibility of seemingly endless health information (and frequently, misinformation), social-networking sites have changed the landscape of physical cultures. And these new digitised cultures of sport, fitness and health are those in which gendered pedagogies are mobilised, circulated, and interpellated. As Instagram has vaulted into the number one platform utilised by athletes, sport researchers have begun to advance inquiry into the relationship of SNS and sport in earnest.[28] [29]

SNS were once thought of as "a set of technologies built in resistance to the ugliness of the dot-com era," but are now intrinsically intertwined with neoliberal capitalism and data surveillance (boyd 1). The phenomenon of brand cultures, in which brand relationships have

[28] As demonstrated by the special issue on digital qualitative research in *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, published in 2021.

[29] Scholarship on image-based social media usage, such as that of Instagram, has lagged behind that of text-based platforms, such as Twitter. The relative ease of accessing textual data through the Twitter API, versus the collection of images and captions, has led to the privileging of tweets, hashtags and studies of network in media and communication studies (Highfield and Leaver).

become “cultural contexts for everyday living, individual identity and affective relationships” precedes and intensely influenced the emergence of social media (Banet-Weiser 4). Brand cultures, and by extension SNS, are best understood as emphatically *ambivalent* spaces—those in which economic imperatives and cultural norms, as well as compulsory “authenticity” and depictions of one’s “true self” are projected and received simultaneously. As we saw in the last chapter, social media can also be used to challenge dominant discourses, and as a site of education and activism. The ambivalence of the space rests in its unclassifiability as inherently helpful or hurtful space.

Instagram, as a visual social media, is enmeshed in cultural debates about what is appropriate to share on social media and indicted in moral panics regarding narcissism and superficiality, particularly with regard to selfie-taking (and shaming) and the circulation of both body capital, and body shaming. Instagram is a site where users learn to relate to themselves, technology, and to others, in neoliberal modes; the self becomes a project of self-transformation, technology serves as a tool to control self-representation through curation and editing, and others are viewed as objects of comparison/judgement (Toll and Norman 62). However, the platform is not a binarized “good” or “bad” space, but an emphatically ambivalent one, whenever gendered norms, particularly surrounding the body, can also be “challenged, disrupted, and resisted” (Toll and Norman 61).

Though it can be difficult at times, this idea of ambivalence must be kept forefront when considering the genre of social media. I once did a podcast interview in which the host and I discussed the findings of this chapter–that women athletes are putting labour into enacting postfeminist self-brands online. Having spent the previous minutes talking about the importance of rejecting postfeminist discourse in favour of intersectional feminist action, the host asked me:

"what would you hope to see from athletes on social media instead?" This is a very difficult question to answer, as I recognize that running, as a sport, does not pay very much money and that athletes' financial stability is almost always tied to brand sponsors, be they big or small. As women athletes, on the whole, tend to be underpaid compared to their male counterparts, I am supportive of women athletes making money where they can. Do I wish that our sport's financial arrangement wasn't constructed in a way that gives extraordinary power to big brands? Yes, but I think Pandora's Box has been open for too long on that one. Do I wish that athletes were more "authentic" in showing the ups and downs of a life in sport? Well, I'm uncomfortable with the idea of athletes feeling even more obligated to "share" elements of their private life. Do I dislike the fact that the size of one's "following" is part of the equation of remuneration that one receives supposedly solely for sporting performance? Yes. Do I think the current arrangement re-centres whiteness, heterosexuality, and restrictive gender norms? Yes. This is the type of messiness that we must dwell in and the ambivalence we must acknowledge when approaching this issue.

Literature Review

Researchers of cultural studies and girlhood are invested in the examination of postfeminist digital cultures, including social media usage. The digital era has coincided with new femininities emphasising "energy, vitality, capacity, and entrepreneurial spirit, along with public visibility and self-exposure" (Dobson 32). This idealised, youthful new femininity bears the hallmarks of postfeminism's emphasis on individual capacity. In particular, Amy Shields Dobson argues in *Postfeminist Digital Cultures* that "independence and *confidence* in particular emerge as qualities strongly tied to ideal young femininity in broader social and political discourse, and because of this, young women and girls are increasingly hailed to make their

demonstration of such qualities visible over social media (34). This matrix results in increasing numbers of women engaging in what Banet-Weiser calls the "postfeminist brand of femininity," via social media.

Research regarding visual-based social media and sport specifically has, thus far, fallen broadly into two camps; a) that of sports management/marketing; and b) that of digital cultural studies of sport. In 2014, sports management practitioners Akiko Arai, Yong Jae and Stephen Rosse developed the conceptual model of the athlete brand image (MABI). According to the MABI, an athlete's value as a "brand" is based on 1) *their athletic performance*; 2) *their physical attractiveness*; and 3) *the marketability of their lifestyle*. The MABI has since been expanded to consider the specific affordances of SNS (Doyle, Su, Kunkel, emphasis mine). The MABI makes explicit what perhaps any observer of sport culture might have noticed–that it is not just one's raw talent or performance that determines one's success, especially in sports like running with more precarious sponsorship relationships than salaries within big league franchises. Success now often depends also on "physical attractiveness" and "marketability of lifestyle." This seemingly simple trifecta of attributes that make up an athlete's potential as a "brand" elides the sexism, racism, classism, homophobia and ableism that often underscore what is or is not deemed "attractive" or a desirable "lifestyle." In sum, much sport management/marketing research has sought to understand how athletes can enhance their "personal brand" and "consumer relationships" through their use of social media, but neglected the cultural currents and systemic biases underpinning them.[30]

[30] Sport management/marketing research has relied heavily on self-presentation theory, which "refers to how individuals attempt to convey messages or images about themselves to others and control or shape how people view them" (Li et al 2). While this theory traces back to Erving Goffman (1959), in 2012 Katie Lebel and Karen Danylchuk suggested the theorization remained relevant with regard to social media, suggesting that posts could be divided into "frontstage" (ex: self-promotion, interaction with fans) and "backstage" (disclosure of personal information or 'behind the scenes' content). However, as numerous scholars have noted, blurring between front and backstage (Pate, Hardin, Ruihely) and online and offline (Goodyear and Brundon 4) content on social media has

Researchers of feminist digital cultural studies of sport, on the other hand, have taken issue with the fact that sport management/marketing research has failed to consider "the social conditions influencing how sportswomen represent the self online and the gender power relations that serve to govern expressions of desirable athletic femininity" (Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018a 300). For example, though sports management/marketing research has identified that women athletes tend to emphasise their personal lives, including relationships and sexuality, on social media, sports management scholars place little focus on "contemporary gender arrangements and expectations shaping the (self) production of sporting femininities" (Toffoletti, Thorpe and Bruce 362). This is to say, sports management/marketing has focused on the *how* of social media representation (and specifically how to do it "better"—re: to make more money), whereas feminist digital cultural studies of sport has focused on asking *why* athletes present themselves in certain ways online, and how neoliberal brand culture has changed the landscape of sport.

Recent research by Meaghan Toll and Moss Norman (2021) that focused on young women's use of Instagram shows that Instagram is a site for the accumulation of body capital through bodily labour practices that are informed by a postfeminist sensibility. These practices include physical labour in the form of "adornment, exercise, grooming, posting, and effectively using digital technologies," psychological labour in the form of "managing the affective dimensions of social media, including anxieties and fears in order to display a 'can-do' entrepreneurial spirit" and social labour in the form of "the everyday commitment to routines of updating posts and maintaining social connections" (Toll and Norman 62). Though Toll and Norman's research focused on undergraduate women enrolled in kinesiology departments at Canadian universities, their findings have significant interlocution with my findings regarding

increased over the years, as social media platforms have become more popular and integrated into economic systems, and increasingly ambivalent spaces.

Olympic distance runners. This is particularly interesting as Toll and Norman's research participants were not engaging in economic activity via Instagram, in that they did not have financial relationships with clothing, sport accessories, or other types of established branded corporations influencing their posting habits. If the pressure to present as a "can-do" girl exists without money on the line, then logic follows that there is perhaps even more pressure when one is receiving remuneration (or perhaps hopes to eventually receive remuneration) based on one's online self-identity.

Toll and Norman identified four informal rules that their interviewees described as governing their social media engagement in ways that accumulate body capital. These rules included: 1) "showing the body"; 2) "being vainglorious without being vainglorious"; 3) "enhancing, but not editing pictures"; and 4) "showcasing a healthy and active lifestyle" (59).

Theoretical Investments

While this dissertation is engaged in feminist-oriented discourse analysis, within this chapter I also keep in mind the CDA iteration of critical *technocultural* discourse analysis (CTDA) (Brock 2018). Additionally, I am informed by Toffoletti and Thorpe's "athletic labour of femininity" framework, conceived specifically to address the phenomenon that is athlete use of social media (2018).

The athletic labour of femininity framework put forth by Toffoletti and Thorpe is a conceptual scaffold to "account for the aesthetic work that female athletes undertake to brand themselves in the global sports marketplace" (300). The framework rests upon other concepts pertinent to the contemporary postfeminist digital era, including that of "body capital" (Wacquant 1995, Toll and Norman 2021) and "economies of visibility" (Banet-Weiser 2015).

The term body capital derives from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital as economic, social, or cultural; the body can attain value through its physical (ex: exercising), psychological (ex: attitudes and beliefs) and social (ex: "disciplined" living) forms of bodywork. This results in "embodied features, such as body size, shape, look and embodied competencies combin[ing] to imbue a body with more or less value or body capital" (Toll and Norman 62). As in Bourdieu's broader theorization of capital, body capital can be exchanged or converted into other forms of economic, social or cultural capital. Under contemporary consumer capitalism, dependent on economies of visibility, people are increasingly confronted with pressure to exchange their body capital (Edmonds and Mears 45). Social media, in particular image-based platforms like Instagram, are a prime example.

Economies of visibility are part of the matrix which demands aesthetic labour from women and girls. Economies of visibility increasingly structure "not just our mediascapes, but our cultural and economic practices and daily lives" and are phenomena in which "visibility of identities becomes an end in itself, rather than a route to politics" (Banet-Weiser 33). Significantly:

> *The product* in gendered economies of visibility is the feminine body. Its *value* is constantly deliberated over, evaluated, judged, and scrutinised through media discourses, law, and policy. The dual dynamic of regulating and producing the visible self work to not only serve up bodies as commodities but also create the body and the self as a *brand*. (Banet-Weiser 54).

By posting on Instagram, by making themselves visible, women athletes are promoting "highly gendered constructs of their "authentic" selves in response to the requirements of contemporary femininity in a postfeminist climate that valorizes women who demonstrate the capacity for self-actualization and self-making" (Toffoletti and Thorpe 306).

Perhaps the most significant myth regarding social media and women's sport is that it gives agency to women athletes, which relies upon the assumption that women athletes are free to present themselves however they choose online. As Kim Toffoletti and Holly Thorpe note:

> by framing social media use as a ''unique opportunity'' for sportswomen to bypass the dictates of mainstream media, the responsibility, successes and blame for how they are represented in social media falls squarely on the individual athlete, leaving unquestioned how discourses of the emancipatory potential of social media for women's sport contribute to the production of contemporary sporting femininities as *empowered, enabled and highly individualised*. (Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018b 14)

Rather than postulating as to whether women's media representation is "improved" through athlete social media usage, this chapter examines the infiltration of postfeminist ideology into the crafting of the digital self using the conceptual framework of athletic labour of femininity.

To study the athletic labour of femininity demonstrated through a social media platform, the parameters outlined by CTDA are essential. In economies of visibility, certain bodies are highlighted or rendered more legible than others, particularly those that possess body capital considered most easily brandable (re: white, thin, fit, able-bodied, "hot"). The interactive and algorithmic components of social media like Instagram are part of how this visibility—specifically of the "body as product"—is circulated (19).

CTDA involves the incorporation of critical theory to approach both information communication technology (ICT) artefacts *and* the discourses that proliferate among them. That is, it requires a commitment to studying technocultural discourses "from the cultural perspectives of the user and the designer" (Brock 1020). In the case of my study, this means the incorporation of feminist theory to examine 1) the material realities and affordances (including the history of the app, design characteristics) of Instagram; 2) the cultural ideology circulating within extant

offline spaces (postfeminism, the performance storyline in sport, brand culture) and; 3) the technological practices (how athletes are using the app).

A CTDA approach requires the consideration of the cultural context in which Instagram was developed and has evolved. Instagram was created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. The very first post on Instagram was a photo without a caption, intimating that the *visual* has, from the beginning, been the preeminent mode of communication on the app. In 2011, the designers introduced hashtags, allowing increased searchability and connection across the app. Instagram was only available for iPhone users until 2012, resulting in limitations on the user population based on technological access.

Instagram's most crucial cultural shifts have occurred since the app was purchased by Facebook for 1 billion dollars in 2012. Facebook, of course, was first developed by Mark Zuckerberg in 2003 under the name "FaceMash" for the purpose of rating the "hotness" of female students at Harvard. In 2015, following the purchase of Instagram by Facebook (which rebranded as "Meta" in 2021), advertising launched on the app, increasing the intensity of Instagram as a commercial space. Another key alteration came in 2016 when the content of Instagram newsfeeds was changed from chronological to algorithmic.

According to Instagram, algorithms determine one's newsfeed based on personal user preferences (ex: one's history interacting with an account, one's interests as determined by likes/follows, popularity of a post). The transition from a chronological to an algorithmic newsfeed is significant as a move by designers to attempt to show the user only "what they want to see," based on machine-learning. The Instagram algorithms determine, to a certain extent, who is rendered visible, and who is not.

Since the introduction of an algorithmic newsfeed, users, in particular those seeing "influencer" status, have sought to "game the algorithm," that is, to increase their visibility by abiding by the "rules" of the algorithms. As Kelly Cotter notes, "by establishing conditions by which social media users are seen, algorithms serve as disciplinary norms. Through observing the content and users that attract visibility, users discern participatory norms that algorithms "reward" with visibility" (896). Though impossible to say for certain without interviewing the athletes whose profiles I tracked for the purpose of this study, it is quite likely that they are aware of patterns in terms of what type of content garners them more visibility online.

Cotter accurately states that a more accurate term for this "gaming [of] the system" is "playing the visibility game," as such a rhetorical shift changes the "focus from a narrative of lone manipulator to one of an assemblage of actors" (896). "Playing the visibility game" is constitutive to economies of visibility.

Social media also plays a role in promoting an entrepreneurial ideology relatable to postfeminism and the performance narrative habitus of sport. Social media entrepreneurialism and influencer culture promote the idea that "anyone can succeed with a little bit of smarts, perseverance and grit. In reality, influencers often exist by way of pre-existing social privilege" (Cotter 897). When discussing athletes on Instagram in comparison to influencers, I do not wish to uncritically conflate these two terms. The athletes have sporting careers and are not known solely for their social media presence. However, for many athletes, social media is an exercise in personal branding and a source of revenue the same way it is for influencers. Furthermore, as I will discuss below, the International Olympic Committee, in its guidelines around social media posting and the Olympic Games, directly identifies Olympians as "influencers."

Methodology

Data is not neutral. As such, I seek to provide transparency about my account selection rationale, as well as data collection and coding protocols.

The Instagram accounts included in this study are those belonging to the 25 women who made the Canadian and American Olympic teams destined for Tokyo 2020 (2021), at distances from 1500m through to the marathon. This list would have looked very different had I chosen the 25 most followed professional runners on Instagram, which was the other selection protocol considered (and an area for further research). The Olympic-teams option was chosen in order to gather an archive not based solely on who "does Instagram the best," but to enable identification of broad trends across the sport of distance running based on an archive of athletes who are currently experiencing a high level of athletic success. The inclusion of both the Canadian and American teams affords the opportunities to see differences and similarities across the border.

Given the public status of these accounts, I consider the content part of the public domain and did not make an effort to anonymize identities. In selecting specific accounts to focus on, my study follows a similar methodology to that of Sanderson and Smith (2015), Toffoletti, Thorpe and Bruce (2017) and Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018). However, my study differs from these in that all of the athletes included participate in the same sport, versus a sampling of several different sports. This allows me to identify running-specific trends. My approach is different from the hashtag tracking and big data scraping undertaken by Toffoletti and Thorpe (2020), and described by Highfield and Leaver (2016).

I used a qualitative hypothesis-generating research process, meaning that I gathered data from the accounts and then used the data to form a hypothesis, rather than entering with a

hypothesis that I was seeking to prove. This aligns with grounded theory, which is based on "grounding" one's research in what participants say (Auerbach 17).

CTDA is not just a theoretical model, but also a guide for methodological practice. The key tenets of CTDA are 1) multi-modal data operationalizing; 2) multi-modal interpretive research methods, and; 3) critical cultural framework(s) applied equally to all data modes (Brock).[31] In the case of my study, multi-modality means collecting data not just on the content of images posted and corresponding captions, but also tags, likes comments, poster-interaction with commenters, and frequency of posting activity. My research methods acknowledge Instagram as both an artifact of study and a medium for discourse, and I undertake a feminist critique of both.

The data collection period lasted from July 4th - July 28th, 2021, roughly the time period between athletes qualifying for the Olympics, and the beginning of the Athletics events in Tokyo. I collected data every three days, resulting in a cumulative 72 individual posts for analysis. For each post, the following was noted:

- Type of content (photo or video)
- Activity depicted in post
- Tone of caption
- Type of outfit
- Number of people in post
- Whether a sponsor logo was visible
- Whether the post was sponsored content
- Number of likes
- Number of comments
- Hashtags used
- Accounts tagged
- Whether or not the athlete engaged with followers

[31] I understand the term "multi-modality" in Brock's sense, as reflecting "the Internet's simultaneity as infrastructure, service, platform, application, object, subject, action, and discourse" (##).

This information was collected manually and collated within spreadsheets. Twenty-two out of twenty-five athletes were sponsored. Nike and New Balance tied for most represented, with six sponsored athletes each. Three athletes were non-white–two Black athletes, one Asian athlete. The youngest athlete was twenty-three, the oldest forty-one, with a median age of twenty-eight. The athlete that posted the most posted 21 times in the 24 day period, the athlete who posted the least did not post at all in the data collection period.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this methodology. Rule 40 came into effect during the data collection period, meaning that athletes could no longer wear/refer to sponsors other than official Olympic sponsors. In the case of Team Canada and Team USA, Nike was the official sponsor of the athletics teams. Athletes are not allowed to make any posts during the Rule 40 period that "imply that a product or service enhanced the Participant's performance" or include a personal endorsement. Athletes are allowed to post one "thank you message" to non-Olympic sponsors, but such posts "must not suggest a commercial connection between the IOC, NOC, or a national Olympic team and a non-Olympic sponsor. Additionally, in the athlete-oriented documents explaining the Rule 40 regulations for Beijing 2022, the instructions read: "Athletes should also be aware of the influence they have over their fans' buying decisions if they promote a brand in their posts. Athletes (like other influencers) should be **honest, transparent**, and **not mislead** their followers about whether they have been paid, incentivized or rewarded to promote a brand in their posts. This should be clearly stated when a brand is referenced in any way" (9 emphasis original). These instructions demonstrate the IOC understanding of athletes as social-media *influencers* and reiterate the massive role social media plays in both the cultural and economic imperatives of the Olympic Games and broader sporting world. The commencement of the Rule

Table 1: List of Canadian and American distance Olympians, including event, sponsor, age, race, college, followers, and number of posts

Name/ Country	**Event**	**Sponsor**	**Age**	**Race**	**NCAA/U-Sports**	**Followers July 9**	**Followers July 29**	**# of posts**
Elle Purrier St Pierre (USA)	1500m	New Balance	26	White	University of New Hampshire (NCAA DI)	62300	64400	4
Cory McGee (USA)	1500m	New Balance	29	White	University of Florida (NCAA DI)	133000	139000	17
Heather MacLean (USA)	1500m	New Balance	26	White	University of Massachusetts (NCAA DI)	16300	17600	4
Emma Coburn (USA)	Steeple	New Balance	30	White	University of Colorado (NCAA DI)	470000	480000	21
Courtney Frerichs (USA)	Steeple	Nike	28	White	University of Missouri, University of New Mexico (NCAA DI)	52700	53100	4
Val Constien (USA)	Steeple	Tracksmith	25	White	University of Colorado (NCAA DI)	5481	5931	11
Elise Cranny (USA)	5000m	Nike	25	White	Stanford University (NCAA DI)	23000	23800	4
Karissa Schweizer (USA)	5000m 10000m	Nike	25	White	University of Missouri (NCAA DI)	70800	72300	13
Rachel Schneider (USA)	10000m	Hoka	29	White	Georgetown University (NCAA DI)	23000	23600	13
Emily Sisson (USA)	10000m	New Balance	29	White	Providence College (NCAA DI)	88000	89900	9
Alicia Monson (USA)	10000m	On Athletics	23	White	University of Wisconsin-Madison (NCAA DI)	8770	9311	4
Aliphine Tuliamuk (USA)	Marathon	Hoka	32	Black	Wichita State University (NCAA DI)	35200	37200	5
Molly Seidel (USA)	Marathon	Puma	26	White	University of Notre Dram (NCAA DI)	83700	85700	12
Sally Kipyego (USA)	Marathon	Nike	35	Black	Texas Tech University (NCAA DI)	9077	9354	0

Table 1, continued

Natasha Wodak (CAN)	Marathon	Lululemon	39	White	University of Arkansas Little Rock (NCAA DI) Simon Fraser University (U-Sports)	12100	12300	5
Name/ Country	**Event**	**Sponsor**	**Age**	**Race**	**NCAA/U-Sports**	**Followers July 9**	**Followers July 29**	**# of posts**
Dayna Pidhoresky (CAN)	Marathon	Lululemon	34	White	University of Windsor (U-Sports)	3118	3282	1
Malindi Elmore (CAN)	Marathon	Saucony	41	White	Stanford University (NCAA DI)	4053	4359	14
Andrea Seccafien (CAN)	10000m	Nike	30	White	Samford University (NCAA Di) University of Guelph (U-Sports)	6022	6129	2
Julie-Anne Staehli (CAN)	5000m	New Balance	27	White	Queen's University (U-Sports)	2748	3483	7
Kate Van Buskirk (CAN)	5000m	Unsponsored	34	White	Duke University (NCAA D1)	5277	5440	9
Geneviève Lalonde (CAN)	Steeple	Unsponsored	29	White	University of Guelph (U-Sports)	4018	4122	2
Regan Yee (CAN)	Steeple	Under Armour	26	Asian	Trinity Western University (U-Sports)	1782	1905	5
Alycia Butterworth (CAN)	Steeple	Unsponsored	28	White	University of Idaho (NCAA DI)	–	1117	4
Gabriela DeBues-Stafford (CAN)	1500m	Nike	25	White	University of Toronto (U-Sports)	12200	12500	2
Natalia Hawthorn (CAN)	1500m	Brooks	26	White	University of British Columbia (U-Sports)	1901	2250	4

40 Olympic period potentially had significant influence on athlete posting decisions, and therefore my data, as athletes were limited in their ability to wear, reference, or promote non-Olympic sponsors.

Also, some athletes had already announced that they had made the team prior to the data collection period, and some announced during the period. This is noteworthy because posts declaring an athlete as part of the national team tended to significantly outperform other posts.

Others have argued that relational analysis that combines examination of image-based social media in tandem with data gathered through qualitative interviewing is crucial to avoid reductive and binarized conclusions. I certainly agree that testimony by the athletes surrounding their approach to social media would greatly enhance analysis. However, due to the busy lifestyle of athletes on their way to the Olympics, the feasibility of interviewing all 25 athletes included in this study was minute. This is an area for further exploration, likely with a smaller cohort of athlete social media users.

Findings & Analysis

I identified three prominent trends across the cohort of distance athletes, with the first one *encompassing* those identified by Toll and Norman.

1) Mobilise your body capital

The curated display of the fit body was a major trend. Toll and Norman found that women "made the most of [themselves]" by posting content that "showcases the size and shape of their bodies" and this was also clear in the case of Olympic runners (66). Of the posts aggregated in my study, over half featured the athlete in a sports bra or midriff-baring race kit.[32] [33] Distance running is a sport in which the dominant body type is similar to that fetishized within broader society—able-bodied, thin and visibly toned. While previously the aestheticization and potential for sexual objectification of women athletes was often seen as directed by the patriarchal male gaze of the sport media complex, the remaking of this into sexual *subjectification*, presented as "self-

[32] Women runners do not always have a choice when it comes to uniforms, which are designed by their personal sponsor, or the national team sponsor. Racing briefs or leotard-like uniforms debuted in the 1980s and midriff-baring race kits debuted in the 90s. Men's uniforms, while becoming more technical, have remained predominantly as shorts and a singlet.

[33] In 2021, the Norwegian women's handball team was fined for refusing to compete in bikini bottoms because uniform requirements from the International Handball Federation required that bottoms had sides no more than four inches long, while men could wear shorts that fell anywhere above four inches from the knee. The German gymnastics team opted to compete in full unitards rather than leotards at the Tokyo Olympic to protest the sexualization of women gymnasts.

directed, agentic and empowered" impetus to show the body, is distinctly postfeminist (Toffoletti and Thorpe 313). The women with the top three highest number of followers, posted almost exclusively photos of themselves in sports bras or race kits.

The high number of posts in which runners are shirtless, with their defined abs visible, indicates an awareness of the cultural desirability—the capital—of their bodies. Or, perhaps, an awareness that Instagram posts that display the body garner more visibility on the app. In a study undertaken by the European Data Journalism Network in 2020, findings showed that posts featuring women in bikinis or other undergarments were 54% more likely than other posts to show up in the newsfeeds of study participants (Richard et al np). Posts of men shirtless were 28% more likely to show up in newsfeeds, whereas posts featuring landscapes or food were 60% less likely to show up in the newsfeeds of volunteers (Richard et al np). These findings demonstrate an algorithmic prioritisation of the gendered display of the fit body, thus becoming a prescribed participatory norm for runners on social media seeking visibility/engagement.

However, one must not be caught overtly displaying the body. Toll and Norman called this rule the "Instagram paradox" whereby one must "be vainglorious without being vainglorious"—that is, one must show off the body without being seen as deliberately showing off the body (68). Depicting one's body in a physically active state was described by the interviewees of their study as "foster[ing] an element of authenticity" and allowing them to "display their bodies and accumulate body capital without getting caught doing so" (69). In my study, 45% of the time, athletes posted themselves at competitions or actively training (defined as the body in motion) and 20% of the time posted themselves passively training (when the athlete is at a training venue as part of practice, but is not in motion). Since the posts that show

off the body the most are those that involve training, they bypass being an overt display of the body the way that, say, posed bikini photos serve.

Exercise is not the only form of bodily labour required to accumulate and mobilise body capital on Instagram. Bodily labour in the form of posing and self-surveilling is also required. Participants in Toll and Norman's study described taking pictures for Instagram as a deliberate process, often involving taking several photos in the same spot with slight posing changes to try and achieve optimal angles and body positioning. While I did not interview all of the athletes in my study, so it was not possible to hear them describe their own practices, evidence emerged that similar processes of staging photos were undertaken by the Olympic athletes. For example, in a post by steeplechaser Emma Coburn (shown below), she is posing in a sports bra and sweatpants on the balcony of her apartment in the Olympic village. The top comment is from her teammate Cory McGee, who wrote: "'Do a hair flip, ok put your foot here, ok reach your arm out'" insinuating that she was the one "stage directing" Coburn's photoshoot. Coburn responds with "you really had my back," confirming the role that McGee played in helping her get "the shot." McGee's comment was liked 121 times—an unusually high number for a comment—suggesting that her remark resonated with other followers.

Additionally, one member of the Canadian team that I did speak to post-Olympics described the process of taking "hundreds" of photos of her teammate at a certain location. Upon looking at them, the teammate said, "Okay, I know what I need to do differently," and requested that more photos be taken with tweaked posing.

These examples highly suggest that Olympic athletes are undertaking self-regulating bodily labour practices to get the "perfect shot." As Toll and Norman note, "these practices [are] always occurring within a surveillant gaze that interpellate[s] the self-regulating neoliberal

subject to produce a normative feminine embodiment—that is, an attractive, happy, active and fit performance of femininity" (70). When athletes are not themselves the "creative directors," so to speak, and photoshoots are being directed by a sponsor or a team for marketing purposes, the athletes may have less autonomy over wardrobe and posing choices, but the "pretty and powerful" athlete-brand remains consistent.

Figure 1: Screenshot from @emmacoburn

The final rule identified by Toll and Norman's study was the imperative for women to demonstrate "healthy and active lifestyles" particularly in outdoor spaces, wanting to distance themselves from the gym selfies of Instagram fitness models, constructing them as problematic "Instagram-Others." These models/influencers were framed by participants as engaging in physical activity for less pure reasons (ie to look a certain way rather than to perform athletically) and critiqued as encouraging unrealistic body ideals and feeding body dysmorphia (and also for being overtly vainglorious). However, "participant critiques of Instagram influencers and the idealised body stop short of problematizing the normative whiteness,

capitalist and heteropatriarchal ideologies that underpin the fashion and beauty industry on Instagram (and elsewhere) (73). As high-level athletes, the women included in my study would not face accusations of training for aesthetic rather than athletic goals, and yet also for the most part have the same type of lean and visibly muscular physique that the Instagram-Other is accused of caring about achieving. However, they also go to lengths to show their healthy, active, glamorous and well-travelled lifestyle (and their excitement and enthusiasm for it, which I will elaborate on next).

Thus, in my identified trend of "mobilising one's body capital," adherence to the four rules identified by Toll and Norman for the accumulation of body capital—show the body, be vainglorious without being vainglorious, enhance but don't edit and show a healthy/active lifestyle—are identifiable. This suggests that rather than being inherently unique to the sport, Olympic women runners are mobilising their athletic body capital to participate in a broader trend towards a postfeminist brand of femininity circulating within economies of visibility.

2) Be! Happy! (Or wait, did I mean authentic?)

The fact that social media serves as a highlight reel rather than an accurate depiction of one's day to day life is not a groundbreaking observation, but one that has been noted by both users of social media and social psychologists over the past decades. SNS compel us to compare our own lives to the highlight reels of other people, often provoking feelings of inadequacy.

My findings very much support the highlight reel hypothesis—that athletes are only posting the good, not the bad or the ugly—but also that these highlights are framed in gendered ways. 76% of the time, the athletes in my study posted in a tone that was upbeat, excited, or expressing gratitude. The next highest tone coded for was humour, coming in at 17%, followed

by inspirational (8%), nationalistic (7%), and finally, disclosure (6%).[34] Upbeat posts emphasise the fun lifestyle of a professional runner, the amazing places travelled to and convey that they are having the time of their lives. This aligns with the third element of the MABI—that sees the marketability of an athlete's lifestyle as important to the athlete's success as a "brand." The determinedly upbeat tone corresponds to what Dobson describes as "the prominence of 'new femininities' in culture and representations that construct and address girls and young women as strong, confident, capable, and fun-loving subjects in contrast to earlier models of weak femininity" (13). The consistent positive emotion projected online is a form of gendered psychological labour, of managing the affective dimensions of social media, undertaken by athletes. This occurs within a broader social context that puts pressure on all women, and particularly young women, to be fun, happy, and smiling (Coulter 487).

Figure 2: Screenshot from @corymcgee

[34] Posts could be tagged as containing more than one tone, for example, both nationalistic and excited.

For example, this post by 1500m runner Cory McGee not only fulfills all the elements of body capital accumulation—the body is shown and carefully posed, but in an active setting that demonstrates a healthy/active lifestyle—the caption depicts the athlete-life as a charmed one. It is not just a fit lifestyle celebrated here, but a glamorous one where one might travel to multiple countries in a given day, and have seemingly unlimited resources to travel during a pandemic. Similarly, Andrea Seccafien's post also glamorised the life of a pro runner. She jokingly refers to the pre-Olympic training camp she attended as a "vacation."

Figure 3: Screenshot @aseccafien

Disclosure, which I defined as an athlete making any sort of admission or reference to their personal life, made up the smallest fraction of posting tone. While social media gives a sense of unparalleled access and ability to "know" an athlete, most athletes aren't sharing that much about their personal lives, but rather a carefully curated projection of their #veryfunjob.[35] This corresponds with Andrea Geurin's findings in her 2017 study of women Olympians and new media use; Geurin noted that athletes "appeared to use Marshall's 'public private self' with

[35] This hashtag was popularised by the Team Boss training group including Cory McGee, Emma Coburn, Aisha Praught-Leer and Dominique Scott.

their online self-presentation, although they wanted to appear as though they were engaging in the "transgressive intimate self" category" (356). Or, as Banet-Weiser frames it, brand cultures are a space where it is not simply the presentation of one's "authentic" self that is important, but the "ability to brand oneself *as authentic"* (203 emphasis mine). Posts referred to workouts or training going well, but none of the posts included in my study included any reference to interruptions or hiccups in training leading up to the Olympics. Yet, after the Games it became clear that at least three of the athletes included in the cohort were injured prior to heading to Tokyo.

Most of the athletes never interacted with the comments of followers who they did not know, underlining the one-sided nature of SNS as parasocial. Conversely, athletes and in particular teammates consistently interacted and engaged with each other in the comment-section, underlining the (appearance of) fun and friendship being had by all. This practice of commenting on each other's photos, often with celebration of the poster's physical appearance, serves a similar function to the influencer phenomenon known as "pods" in which members all agree to engage with each other's posts in order to mutually garner more visibility. Training groups like the "Boss" group or "Bowerman Babes" essentially serve as pods, with everyone actively engaging with the social media of members.

I'm not trying to suggest that athletes have to share more of their personal lives with fans, or that they have to make available their moments of anxiety, doubt or failure. As cultural critics have been quick to point out, presenting oneself differently online is not that different than speaking, dressing or behaving differently in public, at work, or at school, than we do in the privacy of our own homes. But this returns us to the concept that circulates at the centre the matrix of pressures on women and girls in postfeminist digital cultures—*authenticity*. One must

be "'authentic' and 'transparent,' but not narcissistic" as well as "visible and exposed in very specific and conditional ways" (Dobson 15). Is it "inauthentic" and demonstrating a lack of "transparency" to only show one's highlight reel? Do athletes feel like they're only permitted to show their "authentic" selves when things are going well? Is it authentic to be unhappy, or is it just easier to be authentic when one is?

To discuss these questions, I turn to examples outside of my data cohort because, as noted, the runners in my collection were all determinedly upbeat and excited. Instead, I turn to two athletes who *didn't* make the Olympic Team, despite it being their goal, and put out videos over SNS regarding their pre-Olympic Trials training experience as it intersects with their social media persona.

2016 Olympic Steeplechaser Colleen Quigley released a video the week of the US Olympic Trials announcing that she would be pulling out of the competition because of "issues with [her] body." She stated to her 248000 followers:

> The last couple months have been really hard and one of the reasons I think it's been hard is that I felt like I couldn't share this part of my journey publicly with all of you guys. And that is something that I always try and do, is be really *authentic* and true and show the good and the bad and the ups and downs but this time I just felt extra pressure [...]

The video seems almost confessional. One week before pulling out of the Trials, Quigley posted a photo of her modelling Lululemon gear with the caption "Sticking with a red, white and blue theme until I make my second Olympic team two weeks from today." According to Quigley's later video, at the time of posting about her confidence regarding making the team, she had already been dealing with some sort of injury or issue (she is not specific with what happened, referring to "issues with [her] body").

Another example comes from fellow steeplechaser, Allie Ostrander, who did compete at the US Olympic Trials. In a video posted to YouTube and shared through her Instagram account leading up to the Trials, Ostrander, also in a confessional-style self-filmed video, describes being admitted to a treatment facility for an eating disorder. The 24-year apologised to her followers for being a "terrible example" and perpetuating a "toxic culture of an obsession with leanness and thinness and body size and appearance over ability." Like Quigley, she says that *authenticity* was a motivator in sharing this experience:

> Last Friday I was making a workout video and afterwards I was crying, I was a mess [...] And I was like 'Okay, I've got to delete this clip, I've got to take a new one. I can't be bawling during my workout video, and then I was like 'Allie, what? Why are you going to get rid of this video? [...] if you're only ever going to show videos of you happy and smiling and having good workouts that's really *inauthentic*, and just because you're crying or upset is not a reason to not post a video. In fact, maybe that's a reason to post a video because it normalises having bad days and being sad and having mental health issues, all of which are common and okay, but aren't seen as such and they are something that no one portrays on social media. [...] You need to be actually *authentic* and show what's truly going on and stopping putting on this *facade* that you're just in Colorado for some altitude training

Both Quigley and Ostrander describe the importance of being authentic in their social media output—and also an awareness that they have made efforts to brand themselves as authentic, and feel as though that is the impression their followers have of them. And yet both athletes also seem aware of an expectation for them to be, as Ostrander phrases it "happy and smiling and having good workouts." Quigley describes the pressure she felt going into the Trials not to share the reality of her training as coming not from her sponsors, coaches or family, but from within herself—an internalised pressure to project an excited, Can-Do identity. Both athletes seem to be speaking to the emotional/psychological labour that has gone into the projection of a Can-Do self on Instagram, that has been exhausting for them.

This is a potent reminder of social media as a disconcerting and emphatically ambivalent space. Do followers have a right to feel duped if it comes out that an athlete was hiding an injury? Where is the line between "being authentic" and giving oneself boundaries and privacy, which in the case of both Ostrander and Quigley involves issues with their mental or physical health? Social media has already broken the border between public and private, and for athletes it also has blurred the line between personal and professional and created an economic imperative to share.

3) Cultivate an athletics-focused identity

The third trend identified was the cultivation of an athletics-focused identity. As previously discussed, athletes predominantly post training-related content and seldom disclose personal details. This is the opposite of Toffoletti and Thorpe's (2018) findings with regard to their study of the social media output of Ronda Rousey (mixed martial arts), Maria Sharapova (tennis), Serena Williams (tennis), Danica Patrick (motorsport) and Alana Blanchard's (surfing) social media output. Toffoletti and Thorpe found that "in contrast to the visibility of their personal lives, self-disclosure of their sporting lives (i.e. the pain following an intense training session, or working with nutritionists, coaches or psychologists) is largely invisible" (24). Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) found that sportswomen post more frequently than their male counterparts, and tended to depict themselves doing non-sporting activities in private settings.

In contrast, my findings suggest that Olympic runners are very aware that followers are there to see running-related (but still heterosexy and empowered) content. Several athletes have admitted to having separate, private Instagram accounts for the purpose of sharing non-running photos with friends, while their public accounts are professional. Athletes posted themselves solo 62% of the time and with teammates/competitors/coaches 32% of the time during data collection,

meaning that only 6% of the time did they post photos with non-sporting related people, demonstrating an awareness of their accounts as running-focused. The highest follower numbers belonged to the accounts who posted the most frequently, and whose content featured athletic-focused photos that aligned with Toll and Norman's rules for the accumulation of body capital. The frequency of posting, the practice of "feeding the 'gram," is another form of labour undertaken by athletes, as they must constantly manage their profiles. The athletes who do this the most consistently (i.e. the most like a "business") are the ones with the highest profiles. Number of followers, a signal of the popularity of the athlete, did not necessarily align with the athlete's history of athletic success. That is to say that first time Olympians like Cory McGee, through cultivation of self-representation as postfeminist athlete-brand, were able to garner more of a following than repeat Olympians, or other athletes that had performed better throughout the season, but posted less on Instagram.

These observations, coupled with the mobilisation of body capital and adherence to projecting an upbeat/excited attitude over SNS, demonstrate widespread cultivation of the self as a postfeminist athlete-*brand*. The mobilisation of body capital, upbeat attitude and cultivation of an athletics-oriented online presence are "techniques through which distinctive formations of contemporary sporting femininity are constituted in advanced capitalistic societies" (Toffoletti and Thorpe 300).

To say that athletes are cultivating themselves as an athlete-brand is not to fall into a simplistic interpretation that women athletes are commodifying themselves for consumption. Rather, "by situating these emergent modes of self-representation within brand culture it becomes possible to interpret women's self-representations online as repositories of values, beliefs, attitudes and feelings that evoke affects" (203). There is clear value placed on the able,

fit body, “authentic” excitement and a glamorous but healthy lifestyle as an idealised form of femininity. These together form a Can-Do athlete-brand with both economic (endorsements, salaries, post-competition opportunities) and cultural (admiration) benefits.

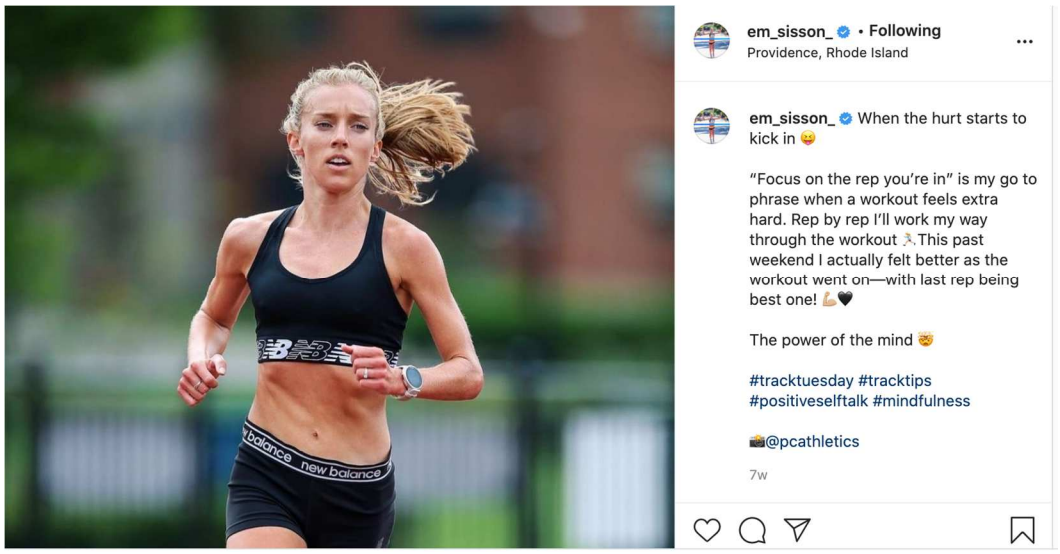
My findings indicate athlete awareness and cultivation of a self-brand as athletic ‘Can-Do’ girls, but it is also evident that such self-branding occurs in the context of broader neoliberal brand culture. As mentioned previously, twenty-two out of twenty-five athletes were sponsored by a major shoe/clothing brand. Seventeen of the athletes competed in the NCAA for the entirety of their undergrad and two more began in the NCAA but then switched home to Canadian schools, leaving only six athletes (all Canadians) without NCAA exposure. Five out of six of these athletes were first time Olympians, which suggests a more recent trend of top talent staying home to attend and compete at Canadian universities. Those same five athletes are also among the lowest follower counts. Runners who moved through the NCAA system versus the Canadian University system (U-Sports, formerly CIS) tended to have higher follow numbers.

The NCAA operates as a capitalistic venture and American universities view their sports teams as money-making entities much more than their Canadian counterparts (though there has been a push in recent years for the Canadian system to increasingly emulate the US system). This structure indicates that the American collegiate sport business media matrix may expose NCAA athletes earlier to self-promotion and branding strategies. NCAA athletes nowadays learn to represent a school’s brand via social media before they may go on to represent a retail brand.

With the 2021 changes to NCAA name, image and likeness rules, collegiate level athletes now have the opportunity to monetize their name recognition as an athlete in a way previously forbidden. While lauded by some as a step towards compensating collegiate athletes for their labour, the new NIL rules, and organisations popping up surrounding them, may further reinforce

the idea that one needs to "become a brand." For example, Nike founder Phil Knight and other Nike executives have launched a corporation called Division Street, Inc, with the express purpose of assisting University of Oregon athletes in monetizing their names, images, and likenesses by building themselves as "athlete brands." UO student athletes already underwent a social-media "training" in their first year at the university, prior to the NIL changes.

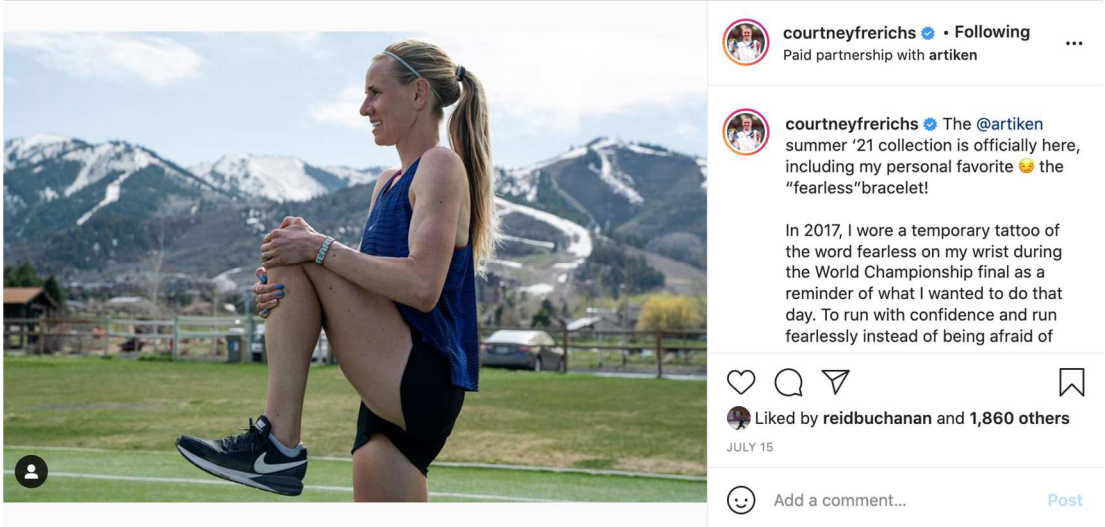
Regardless of citizenship or location of schooling, Instagram served as a neoliberal space across the board. Of all posts within the collection period, 80% had the logo of a primary (shoe brand) or secondary sponsor visible, or the sponsor tagged. Exposure of the primary sponsor was never labelled as sponsored content or as an advertisement, but rather through the mere visibility of the logo, tagging, or use of a specific hashtag. This strategy allows for the primary sponsor's products to be presented as just part of an athlete's day to day life. For example, below is a screenshot taken from 10,000m runner Emily Sisson's account. While her fit body is displayed and the pain of a hard workout is made lighthearted in the caption, her sponsor, New Balance, is front and centre, seamlessly incorporated into her training routine.



In only 6% of posts did the athlete overtly label a post as sponsored content, yet 17% of posts showed the athlete holding up or using a product (ex: sports drink, recovery tool) with the brand tagged and referenced, without the athlete clearly stating the post was sponsored. For example, in the post below, Emma Coburn displays and references a particular sports drink without disclosing her economic relationship with the brand. Rather, the brand is seamlessly incorporated into her captivating life as a pro runner. A 2021 study found that nearly 90% of the time athletes did not disclose their material relationship to a brand when posting brand related content, despite the Federal Trust Commission's regulatory requirements to do so (Geurin and Brison 12). This is likely because posts that are overtly labelled as sponsored content tend to get fewer likes than those "authentically" integrated into the athlete's feed, the type of observation that sport management practitioners have been attuned to.

Conversely, this image of steeplechaser Courtney Frerichs demonstrates an athlete clearly signalling an economic relationship with a brand through tagging. Yet, the strategy for advertising the ArtiKen bracelet is through Frerich's personal story about gaining confidence and

being fearless while racing. The inclusion of a personal anecdote by the athlete softens the extent to which the post comes across as straight up #sponcon and means that despite it being an overtly economic relationship, Frerich's post retains a sense of "authenticity."



Similarly to the phenomenon observed in postfeminist athlete memoirs like those of Deena Kastor and Alexi Pappas, these posts by Sisson and Frerichs also emphasise the power of positive thinking and a "mind over matter" attitude towards sport. In Frerich's case, she even directly ties the support of such an attitude to a consumer brand. In a similar vein, Karissa Schweizer posted a race photo that included in the caption "You can always make your own opportunities" (July 13 2020); many of Kate Van Buskirk's photos feature a tattoo that reads "Be Relentlessly Positive"; examples of course that dovetail with the requirement to be constantly upbeat! and excited! As explored in previous chapters the emphasis on hard work (and even disavowal of talent) supports the idea of sport as a meritocracy and upholds the performance narrative. The mix of this rhetoric with visual mobilisation of body capital suggests that the physique, sport performance, and lifestyle of these women is available to anyone willing to work hard enough or want it badly enough, and that perhaps buying the brands they wear is a first step along the way.

While sport management perspectives on social media are directed at SNS as a tool to enhance promotional opportunities and sponsorship, "wider consideration of the ubiquity of consumer culture draws attention to the growing centrality of branding to the formation of contemporary subjecthood and social relations in societies demarcated by economic forms of neoliberal rationality" (Toffoletti and Bruce 301). Increasingly, when making sponsorship decisions, primary sponsors like Nike or New Balance and secondary sponsors like ArtiKen or Momentous, want to sign not an athlete, but an athlete-brand. That is, they want to be associated with and integrated into not just their athletic achievements, but also with their physical appearance and lifestyle. For women runners, this means a displayed (but not vaingloriously) fit-body, and a desirable lifestyle that one is constantly excited about; brands want Can-Do girls.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the physical, psychological and social labour undertaken by women runners—their athletic labour of femininity—that goes into creating self-representations as pretty and powerful athlete-brands via Instagram.

Women runners mobilise their body capital by frequently appearing shirtless and posting in ways that show off their toned, thin bodies. They are constantly upbeat, excited and grateful for their life as athletes. They cultivate a running-oriented identity; online they are "a runner," rather than "a person." These trends emerge within a postfeminist digital culture and broader *brand culture* that places pressure on women to be "heterosexy," "confident," "happy," "empowered," "transparent" and "authentic." The posting strategies of women runners align with imperatives identified by young women as governing the accumulation of body capital via Instagram—to show off one's body, be vainglorious without being vainglorious, to enhance but not edit, and to show off a healthy lifestyle. As pro runners, a sport with a highly idealised

gendered body type in broader culture that is also not deemed gender-divergent, these young, thin, toned and overwhelmingly white women are prime candidates for a projection of postfeminist Can-Do-ism.

Athletes are encouraged to think of themselves as a brand and to leverage their self-representation via Instagram to gain greater followings that correspond to greater sponsorship and economic opportunities. This mindset is further exacerbated by the economic model that running operates on. Almost all athlete salaries are tied to major shoe brand sponsorships, rather than as national or other team members. In this already fraught economic situation, social media has further altered the landscape of sponsorship in competitive running—it no longer matters solely how fast you run, but also how marketable you are as a brand. This fact is patently obvious in the way that the highest followed accounts are run like businesses in terms of the consistency and cohesiveness of posting.

While social media has been heralded as a way for women athletes to take back the microphone and camera lens from a patriarchal sport media complex and represent themselves however they please, the reality is not so simple. These women may now be in charge of their own accounts, they still face cultural and economic imperatives telling them to self-represent as ideal postfeminist subjects. By examining the SNS output of two runners who did not make the US Olympic Team, and who "came clean" about how they had manipulated their social media presence, I demonstrate the polysemy of demands for "authenticity" or "transparency" online, particularly in the case of women who feel they have "failed" to live up to the ideal Can-Do girl. Further examination into athlete's personal strategies and feelings about social media will add to the scope of analysis.

Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin wrote in 2003 that "Female athletes were once oddities, goddesses or monsters, exceptions to every social rule. Now the female athlete is an institution" (xvi). Their statement might be updated to read: Now the female athlete is a *postfeminist brand*.

CHAPTER IV: CODA

The "problem" with undertaking a project situated in the contemporary moment is that stuff keeps happening that should go in the project–USATF drastically lowered the Olympic Trials qualifying time for the marathon, ensuring that the next women's field will be significantly smaller, the USA Olympic Trials and Tokyo Olympics took place in dangerous heat, signalling the precarity of sport in the face of climate change, Alberto Salazaar was permanently banned for emotional and sexual misconduct, the American marathon record was lowered by Keira D'Amato, a 37-year old mother of two who took years off of competitive running post-college, Allyson Felix became the most decorated track athlete in US history, important books were or are set to be released, such as Alison Désir's *Running While Black: Finding Freedom in a Sport That Wasn't Built for Us.* Women's running is undergoing a transformation, and the proverbial cultural ground has been shifting beneath my feet, even as I write this text.

This project started with fiction, and an attempt to recuperate a lineage of women's running fiction from 1970-present that craft female characters that are multiplicitous, complex, entangled in their cultural moment and in kinship with others, all through their experiences of running and identity as runners. None of these women-authored works of running fiction follow the masculinist performance storyline. They do not tell you that if you work hard you will succeed, or that triumph over obstacles is inherent to sport. They do not present sport as intrinsically fair, nor do they represent winning as the pinnacle of experience. They present running as a space of relationality, the "runner's identity" as inclusive rather than exclusive and the joy of the sport as intrinsic rather than extrinsic. They all pay attention to the way the

intersecting identities of women runners impact their experience in a sport that consistently others women. Of all the genres of media representation studied in this project, women's running fiction does the most to reject postfeminist discourse.

Moving into memoir, I found a different trend. The texts that present their Olympian protagonists as "somebodies" (Kastor, Pappas, Favor Hamilton) are markedly different from those that participate in the phenomenon of the "nobody" memoir (Heywood), despite the fact that all of the texts are predicated in the experience of "some [athletic] body." The Olympian memoirists, who seek to self-brand as "role models," engage most frequently in the manipulation of literary strategies to narrativize postfeminist discourse, demonstrating the extent to which a postfeminist sensibility has become intertwined with sport's performance narrative habitus, emphasising self-creation, individuality and sport-as-meritocracy. In order to present themselves as athlete "somebodies" the Olympian memoirists must locate their "somebodiness" outside of the athletic body, through what Banet-Weiser calls "the postfeminist brand of femininity." That is, they document their journey to self-esteem, confidence and "empowerment" through memoir as an act of public self-disclosure. This idea of public-self disclosure as key is reified by each Olympian author's emphasis on the self-narrative as both powerful and completely subjective, malleable, and utterly "up to you!" The more closely a text aligns itself with a postfeminist performance storyline, the more commercially successful it is, signalling a continued cultural obsession with the "Can-Do" girl, and hesitancy to engage with narratives like Heywood's that depict significant cultural issues within sport that an athlete cannot just "overcome," that I argue are essential if we are to truly grapple with sociocultural issues in our sport.

The consideration of advertising campaigns in chapter three moved me out of my textual comfort zone. The "Dream Crazier" campaign is merely one of the latest in Nike's long history

of mobilizing post- and popular feminist ideology to popularize a certain type of feminist girl-subject. The sport conglomerate represents women's potential achievement in sport as a matter of hard work and individual ambition, eliding structural barriers to participation, and feeding a cultural attitude akin to that of Kim Kardashian's infamous 2022 statement that women just need to "Get your f***ing ass up and work" (a more profane version of "Just do it?"). The activist-rejection of Nike's rhetoric led by women runners has started a crucial conversation about gender, racial and (dis)ability equity in the sport. The work of Alysia Montaño, Kara Goucher, Allyson Felix, and other high profile athletes in refuting this postfeminist rhetoric is crucial in keeping increasingly neoliberal sporting spaces accountable. However, their response did not stop Nike from doubling-down on its postfeminist rhetoric as it released its first maternity line and campaign in the wake of "Dream Crazier," titled "The Toughest Athletes"—right before the Tokyo Olympics almost didn't allow breastfeeding athletes to bring their children with them to the Games.

In turning to social media, I found that women runners in particular face both cultural and economic pressures to enact a postfeminist athlete brand online. Competitive women runners engage in what Kim Toffoletti and Holly Thorpe term the "athletic labour of femininity" through their self-representation via Instagram, presenting themselves as "pretty and powerful" athlete-*brands*. This is done through the leveraging of body capital, the perpetuation of a constantly upbeat, excited tone and the curation of an athletics-focused identity, as opposed to a holistic one. This trend in representation occurs in response to contemporary brand culture and celebration of the postfeminist "Can-Do," girl, the one who is "perfect," and in the context of postfeminist digital cultures in which women face contradictory pressures. In an already fraught economic situation, social media has further altered the landscape of sponsorship in competitive

running–it no longer matters solely how fast you run, but also how marketable you are as a *brand*.

As the chapters progress, the medium of representation becomes increasingly visual. In fiction, while the author may describe the character/setting, the images are largely within the imagination of the reader. In memoir, the paratextual element of the front cover shot entered us into the realm of the assertion of femininity through the visual, with all of the authors (Heywood included) emphatically coded as feminine through their dress and posing. Advertising is of course, even more visually-oriented and carefully manipulated by those in production. And then social-media has given us perceived unfettered visual access to the lives of our favourite runners, and supposedly the "control" over their own images is handed back to the athletes themselves (that is, if you don't account for the cultural pressure to present themselves in certain ways). In reading the chapters together though, it becomes clear how important the image is to postfeminism; the more visual the media genre, the more intensely postfeminism seemed to infiltrate it.

One of the unexpected outcomes of this project has been my fascination with the way that pregnant, postpartum, and parenting athletes are discursively framed. The findings of the 2016 IOC Expert Group meeting concluded that very little is known, from a scientific basis, about the pregnancy and postpartum experience as it relates to elite sport. I plan for my next project to ask: what do we know from a sociocultural perspective? That project will build from this one, in particular the foundation laid in chapter 3, to consider the experience of pregnant, postpartum, and parenting athletes. I will consider the experience of these athletes as a labour issue, paying attention to systemic inequities in resources and compensation, as well as gendered rhetoric in marketing and media representation.Athlete "supermoms!" are increasingly lauded by popular

media and promoted by sponsors as postfeminist 'Can-Do' women, while privately facing salary freezes and a lack of maternal health care/leave. The Olympics has an (ongoing) history of policing reproductive organs and rights. The upcoming project will draw from this one's background in studies of postfeminist discourse, but extend to athletes in the full spectrum of Olympic events.

Writing this conclusion feels like spotting the finish line at the end of my own personal academic marathon (classic finish line feels: exhaustion, happiness, the "I'm never doing this again" promise to oneself). I'm grateful to those who have prevented me from travelling *extra* miles over the course of this project, but have rather kept me running the tangents through their guidance and support. I hope that you too, reader, feel like you've travelled some distance in your perspective on the stories we tell ourselves about contemporary women's running. It's a Wonderland out there.

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