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# **Governing Homelessness Through Running**

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## **Abstract**

In the context of social welfare austerity and non-state actors' interventions into social life, an urban not-for-profit organization in the United States, Back on My Feet, uses the practice of running to engage those recovering from homelessness. Promoting messages of self-sufficiency, the organization centralizes the body as a site of investment and transformation. Doing so calls forward the social construction of 'the homeless body' and 'the running body.' Within this ethnographic inquiry, participants in recovery who ran with the organization constructed moralized senses of self in relation to volunteers, organizers, and those who do not run whilst in recovery. Their experiences compel consideration of how bodily constructions and practices reproduce morally underpinned, self-oriented associations with homeless and neoliberal discourses that obfuscate systemic causes of homelessness, pose challenges for well-intentioned voluntary or development organizations, and service the relief of the State from social responsibility.

## **Keywords**

homelessness

governance

embodiment

neoliberalism

sport and exercise interventions

ethnography

## **Introduction**

Back on My Feet 'promotes the self-sufficiency of homeless populations by engaging them in running as a means to build confidence, strength and self-esteem' (2010)<sup>1</sup>. The organization exemplifies the rise of non-state actors' interventions into social life within a context of social welfare austerity. In the program, volunteers meet at recovery facilities to run with those in various stages of recovery from homelessness, addiction, poverty, lack of employment, or legal issues. Running volunteers and those in the process of recovery are here juxtaposed, as are their bodies. Centralizing the body as a site of investment and transformation calls forward discourses about 'the homeless body' and 'the running body.' Their consideration locates the body as a site of power and power relations within the organization, its practices, and the context through which they take shape. The lived, embodied experiences of the organization's participants offer insight into the workings of power, self-care, and moralized regulation. Examination of the organization and its practices in this way contributes to literatures on the sociology of the body, sociology of sport and physical activity,

homeless bodies and discourses, and sport and exercise interventions and development initiatives.

Sport and exercise have long been recognized as mechanisms of organization and regulation. 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain saw sport structured into the shifting demands of the modern, urbanized industrial workforce (Holt, 1989). European and North American reformers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century mobilized sport and exercise to propagate Christian values in the form of a Muscular Christianity that adhered to principles of physical fitness and health, Christian morality, manliness, and discipline (e.g., Baker, 1994; Haley, 1978; Kidd, 2006). In France, Hébert developed a 'Natural Method' of intense physical training to nurture courage, energy, willpower, and coolness that could quell physical or mental obstacles, the precursor to *parcours/parkour* (Atkinson, 2009). As a social institution, sport and exercise are uniquely endowed in relation to the body and its deployment to represent and (re)produce social relationships (Andrews, 1993; Hargreaves, 1987).

More recently, sport and exercise have been appropriated as psychosocial vehicles for addressing marginalized, vulnerable, or 'at-risk' populations in urban contexts (e.g.: Bustad & Andrews, 2017; Clift, 2014; Holt & Jones, 2008; Holt, Scherer, & Koch, 2013; Scherer, Koch, & Holt, 2016; Spaaij, 2009; 2013). A catalyst for such initiatives was *Midnight Basketball* in the United States, which employed late-night basketball games as a means for addressing crime, drugs, and gang-related activity (Hartmann, 2001; 2003). Western Sport Development initiatives have been linked to neoliberal urban contexts wherein sport fills a void in social welfare (Bustad & Andrews, 2017; Clift, 2014; Holt, Scherer, & Koch, 2013; Scherer, Koch, & Holt, 2016). Such initiatives are

often touted as inexpensive means for addressing social issues within political and economic contexts of austerity (Coakley, 2011; Gruneau, 2015; Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Kidd, 2008; Scherer, Koch, & Holt, 2016). However, they have been criticized for their paternalistic values, association with neoliberal ideologies that promote individual, behavioral, and self-responsible solutions to public problems while sidestepping broader structural issues, and effectively positioning people as problems to be solved (Coakley, 2011; Darnell, 2012; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Kidd, 2008; Rossi & Jeanes, 2016).

Back on My Feet represents an emergent sport and exercise initiative that focuses on long-standing issues of homelessness. With running at its core, the organization gives prominence to discourses of 'the homeless body' and 'the running body.' The social constructions of these corporeal forms and the bodies of Back on My Feet participants take shape within a context of neoliberal governance.

### **'The Homeless Body' and 'The Running Body' Amidst Neoliberal Governance**

The bodies of the homeless pose a problem to normalized understandings urban space. 'The homeless body,' Kawash (1998) asserted, must be seen as a specific mode of embodiment giving weight to the ideological and discursive force of the spectre of homelessness. Its construction brings into sharper focus the circuit of the body, its meaning, and its relationship to place. As a mode of embodiment, 'the homeless body' is not identical to the homeless person, that which someone experiencing homelessness inhabits, and nor is it an attribute of homeless people. Rather, within the public imagination, 'the homeless body' is an event marking the exclusion of the homeless

from the public' (ibid., p. 323-4). This marking includes pejorative ascriptions such as dirtiness, disheveled appearance, decay, foul odor, or disease (Amster, 2003; Del Casino & Jocoy, 2008; Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015; Kawash, 1998; Kusmer, 2002), which create social distance between housed and unhoused persons' (Wright, 1997, p. 69).

Pejorative attributes marking 'the homeless body' emerged in opposition to the spaces created through urban renewal strategies from the 1970s to 1990s. The macroscale shifting of urban centers carried equally important microscale concentrations on the homeless body (Kawash, 1998). For those economically and socially marginalized, urban renewal has frequently meant the gentrification of residential areas and privatization of public space (Davis, 1992; Harvey, 2001; Smith, 1996; Wacquant, 2008; Zukin, 1991). As city officials sought to make urban centers more attractive for businesses, tourism, and the middle classes, marginalized groups were displaced to other parts of the city and rendered out of place in public spaces. Policy, legal, and spatial changes impacted not only the material inequalities within urban environments but also the discursive force on the homeless body: To the progress and prosperity meant to imbue renewed urban spaces, the homeless body represented a symptom and symbol of threat (Kawash, 1998, p. 320). In the presence of those within public urban space, a homeless presence inhibited the enjoyment, comfort, and aesthetically pleasing aspects of those who are better off (Wright, 1997), a 'lamentable sight' (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). Such is the extent of this denigration that those experiencing homelessness are effectively deprived of any alternative identity (Kawash, 1998); they are constructed as an urban Other, lacking essential human sensibilities, perceived as un-governable, and occupy a symbolic position between the human or sub-human (Seidman, 2013).

Responses to homelessness illustrate how repressive, disciplinary, and biopolitical forms of governance operate simultaneously. As states shifted from sovereignty toward capitalist democracies, Foucault suggested that the basic biological features of the human species became objects of political strategy across two poles in a formation of biopower, biopolitics and discipline (1977; 1978). Within this shift, biopower complemented repressive forms of power. More repressive forms of action against the homeless—such as encampment clearing, removal of recovery facilities to city outskirts, or vagrancy laws—are aimed at pacifying public spaces, whereas bio-political interventions seek to link the individual body to a broader set of politics orientated around sustaining life at the level of the population (Foucault & Burchell, 2008). In a biopolitical framing, homelessness can be examined, explained, and rationalized through statistical markers across a populace in association with the characteristics of life, such as health indicators, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, and identity (Dean, 2010; Foucault & Burchell, 2008; Willse, 2010). At the level of the individual, discipline inextricably inscribes the body as a site of and for power and knowledge. A disciplinary apparatus controls activity, organizes a progression built on a series of repetition, and monitors behaviors in order to make them more useful to and for specific discourses (Foucault, 1977). Constructed as un-governable, un-disciplined, unruly, or a threat to the public, construction of the homeless and their bodies validate disciplinary regimes aimed at ameliorating behavior, such as imprisonment, psychotherapy, clinical intervention, recovery programs, personal health regimes, and indeed exercise. Resonant with other sport and exercise initiatives, the homeless body represents a problem to be solved. Like at-risk, often black urban youth (Cole, 1996; Hartmann, 2001), homeless young men (Scherer, Koch, & Holt, 2016), and other underserved

groups (Pitter & Andrews, 1997), Back on My Feet's exercise-based approach to addressing homelessness is an emergent intervention informed by constructs of 'the homeless body' and 'the running body.'

The construction of 'the running body' offers a stark contrast to 'the homeless body.' Abbas (2004) asserted that the ideal-type running body is informed and produced by a nexus of *objectivizing* knowledges derived from: Western biomedicine, which influenced the establishment of ideal slender and toned body types, thus creating associations with health and fitness (Hargreaves, 1994); sport sciences, which normalized the human body to suggest that exercise could shape *all* bodies despite their differences; and holistic health approaches, which promoted a growing individual transcendentalism (Berking & Neckel, 1993; Coward, 1990). Early advocates of running suggested that running could even cure various physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social ills (Plymire, 2004). Several have observed that the achievement of this body type occurs through its disciplinization (Abbas, 2004; Bridel & Rail, 2007; Chase, 2008). This idealized form has conferred upon it positive societal values and judgments: The thin and fit running body creates symbolic value oriented around dedication, control, discipline, and a cultural and economic investment in health and self-responsibility (Atkinson, 2008; Shipway & Holloway, 2010). Whereas the running body symbolizes commitment, control, discipline, productivity, and self-responsibility, the homeless body symbolizes failure, threat, unruliness, and un-governability. Juxtaposed, running impresses as a way of conditioning the body, *working* it into a testament to symbolic positive value judgments, fabricating it into normative social order, and rendering the un-governable governable.



Foucault understood that modes of power took shape in specific and historically constituted contexts. He proposed the concept of governmentality as, 'the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other' (1994a: p. 300). In seeking to understand governmentalized social life, Ong (2006) suggested that neoliberalism was a feature linking macro social formation with everyday practices. Rather than an ideology or economic rationality, neoliberalism is a technology of governance, a way of governing without governing that forms 'a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast' (p. 3). It stresses responsibility at communal and individual levels. Nikolas Rose (1999) marked this shift in governance as:

a double movement of autonomization and reponsibilitization. Populations once under the tutelage of the social state are to be made responsible for their destiny and for that of society as a whole. Politics is to be returned to society itself, but no longer in a social form: in the form of individual morality, organizational responsibility, and ethical community. (p. 1400)

Emerging in the 1980s, neoliberalism brought governance to innumerable sites through an array of techniques and programs defined as cultural (Bratich et. al, 2003).

Individual and communal practices of daily life, knowledges, languages spoken, and decisions made are all placed into the realm of governance as processes of subjectification and subject-making (Ong, 2006). Society in this way is understood to be organized less around obedience and more so autonomy, initiative, personal responsibility, and individually oriented freedoms. Back on My Feet operates as a disciplinary technology of governance, a site of corporeal transformation that seeks to foster citizen-subjects according to autonomy and self-responsibility.

Back on My Feet participants, however, are more than discursive constructs. The body is lived in ways that conform, exceed, and challenge social construction. A biopolitical framing risks reducing the body to text without consideration of the everydayness of social practices (Lemke, 2011). The experience of embodiment can only be grasped by understanding the body as a lived experience (Turner, 2008). Yet, ethnography needs to be linked to the 'broader system of material and symbolic relations that give it meaning and significance' (Wacquant, 2002, p. 1523). The immersive fieldwork of 'performing the phenomenon' advocated by Wacquant (2015), or 'enactive ethnography,' is one way of giving weight to the ways in which running participants understand and experience their bodies within wider relationships and discourses.

### **Method: Running With Back on My Feet At The House In Baltimore**

Back on My Feet began in Baltimore in 2009. I began participating in 2010 after an introductory volunteer session where I discussed my interests with Amie, a Director in Baltimore. She supported me as both a volunteer and researcher, and suggested that I join The House team (a pseudonym).

Ethnographic techniques offer ways of inquiring into participants' experiences and self-narrativizations<sup>2</sup>. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and collection of artifacts of the organization were employed (Wolcott, 2008). I participated in running activities more than 60 times, conducted 37 semi-structured interviews with 27 people, and drew from organizational materials and historical documentation on homelessness in Baltimore. Sharing in the experience of collective running with participants fostered a

familiarity and trust between me and the group. Interviews were conducted individually, with the exception of two small-group interviews. Included were nine men in recovery, seventeen volunteers, and the head counselor of The House. A guide formed the basis of developing conversations, which focused on, for example: participants' running experiences, notably in relation to the body; relationships and interactions; organizational events; urban space; and the supportive opportunities offered. Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to more than three hours. I transcribed all interviews verbatim.

Data were analyzed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. Representationally, whilst striving to maintain data accuracy, here passages have been edited for clarity (e.g., removal of hesitations, pauses, or repeated words). Verbatim spoken dialogue is identified with 'single quotations' or block quotes. Pseudonyms are used for each participant. This project received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at University of Maryland.

### *Lacing Them Up*

Back on My Feet is located within the racially diverse Inner Harbour of Baltimore. The racial composition of Baltimore City around this time was 63% Black or African American, 29% White, 4.2% Hispanic or Latino, and 4% other with an average household income of \$39,386 (U.S. Census, 2012). The racial composition of Maryland was 58% White, 29% Black or African American, 5% Asian, and 8% other with an average income of \$70,647 (U.S. Census, 2012). Yet, the number of people below the poverty line was 21% in Baltimore compared to 8% across the State. The sheltered and

unsheltered homeless population in Baltimore was over-represented by African-Americans at 85% (Olubi & Akers, 2011).

In Baltimore, five addiction and homelessness recovery facilities partnered with the organization to form running teams. The House, where I ran, is a 90-bed, all-male residential treatment facility for veterans and others transitioning through the cycle of poverty, addiction, and homelessness. The running organization is comprised of two primary groups of people: 'Residents' and 'Non-Residents.' Residents are those in recovery and housed at a facility. Approximately 45-55 Residents participated across the city within five teams at a given time. The racial composition of participants was 50/50 Black or African-American and White. Five of the men I interviewed were African-American and four were White. Each Resident was recovering from drug or alcohol addiction, lack of employment and income, lack of sustainable housing, and varying degrees of legal matters. Residents ranged in their level of engagement, from the committed to the casual to those that quickly dropped out. Non-Residents are those volunteering with the organization, which included an estimated 200-300 people across the city. Demographic information on volunteers was not kept. Amie estimated this group to be overwhelmingly White. The Non-Residents I interviewed included 10 white women and 8 white men, 1 Black woman, and 1 Asian-American woman.

A typical running day at The House included 6 to 9 Residents and 10 to 20 Non-Residents. We ran three days a week at 5:30AM with an optional 7AM Saturday run. Meeting in the street in front of The House at 5:30AM, each person chose a 2, 3, or 4-mile 'loop.' I participated over the course of two and a half years, ten months of which I was involved day-to-day. For three months, I rented an apartment in Baltimore enabled

by a departmental research award in order to train for a marathon with the organization. A 'run' most typically included the group gathering, introductions, a run through the city, post-run stretches, and brief announcements to conclude. Weekday runs lasted approximately one hour.

### **Reshaping the Body: Learning to Run**

In taking up the practice of running, Residents discussed learning to run in related but distinct ways. They expressed how they prepared via attire and diet. They also discussed that learning to run required enduring its physical dimensions, both physically challenging the body and running through pain. In learning to run, they modeled and molded their bodies in relation to the normative ideals of the running body.

#### *Running Preparations*

Two central aspects featured in Residents' preparations for running, their clothing and food. The clothes runners wear shape the construction of normative running bodies (Chase, 2008). Each participant discussed previous sport and exercise endeavors as a youth or young adult, such as basketball, weight lifting, and baseball. No one discussed running or possessed attire considered running specific. Several had a pair of non-running sneakers or basketball shoes, and basketball shorts or sweatpants. Donning running attire, which was accrued initially from the organization, was a new experience, which Warren depicted:

At one time they used to give us these training socks. The socks even got shock absorbers, right at where the big-toe at! It's an orange... these socks is like \$30! I ain't never seen no \$30 sock, and they gave us two pair when we first started. And they got the ball here, one for the left foot, one for the right foot, and they got the shock on the heel, the whole heel is padded. They feel nice to run in, I still got 'em. They upstairs. (9 August 2011, interview)

After two to four weeks of participation, Back on My Feet provided a pair of running shoes, socks, shorts, and t-shirts.

Over time, Residents accrued shirts from participation in races. For those that ran for more than a few months, there was little distinction between them and Non-Residents. Dressing purposefully was a key strategy for dealing with the physical and aesthetic aspects of running. Malcolm discussed wearing clothes lighter in color: 'My clothes, I try to make them light because we run at night. The sun yet to be up, so I try to make it visible for the driver' (13 August 2012, interview). In the winter, long sleeves and sweats were worn. Dressing as a runner also became a way of feeling more like a team, as Robert conveyed:

When I started I wasn't into a fashion thing with running. I just wore a white t-shirt. Now I'm starting to buy shirts. The Under Armour shirts, shirts from all the races, I like them. I feel good for running the race, plus it's a good shirt. An Under Armor Shirt or a Brookes shirt that's aerated, that lets you breathe. I'm not obsessed with that but there's a part that it seems like being part of the team. It's like a uniform. I do like wearing a uniform, like the army I liked wearing the uniform. It made me feel more proud. (24 July 2012, interview)

By modulating how they adorned their bodies, Residents invoked both the identification of a running or athletic identity and an association with the group.

Initially, Residents lacked the clothing associated with running. As they continued they draped their bodies as would runners. Rather than purchase clothing, they initially and predominantly earned attire through races and accrued mileage. Part of the construction of the running body also includes the identification of association through attire between group members in running cultures, which augments a sense of athletic or social identity (Abbas, 2004; Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Howe, 2004; Shipway & Jones, 2007). Bodily appearance and adornment in these ways became ritualized aspects of participation.

Unlike clothing, food was a form of support that Back on My Feet largely did not provide—the one notable exception was a preparatory group dinner the evening before a major race. Residents expressed a range of food choices. The House predominantly fulfilled day-to-day dietary consumption, typically including the following: Breakfast included French toast, bacon, eggs, sausage, waffles, or grits; lunch comprised a sandwich, chips, and some fruit; and dinner frequently consisted of pasta and rice dishes. Most participants ate at The House because food was provided. This offered stark contrast to Non-Resident descriptions of dietary habits, which were overwhelmingly healthy in orientation. Food preparation, natural foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, and other items that would support an active lifestyle, like supplements or sports drinks, featured in Non-Resident diets. Residents often lacked the means to be able to eat fresh food. Nor were Residents allowed to cook for themselves: At The House, all food was kept in the kitchen and Residents were not allowed to keep personal

food whatsoever. Unless on cooking detail for The House, Residents were not permitted to cook.

Jeff and Matthew demonstrated two contrasting accounts to the challenges of diet. Jeff had some discretionary income because he was working an hourly-paid job, but he regarded eating habits as irrelevant:

There's some runners that put a lot of thought into their diet. Personally, I don't mind going to Five Guys and eating a double grease burger two, three times a week. I don't really worry too much about it. My cholesterol and sugar are under control. Now that might change in another five years. I'll address that in another five years. (4 August 2010, interview)

In contrast, Matthew, who was also working and had some discretionary income, was conscious about the relationship between diet and health:

I have established a relationship with someone from my church that is way conscious. I don't eat at The House anymore. Now that I'm working I have discretionary income where I can set my own diet. Heavy on fresh veggies, I'm pushing 250 and have already had two colonoscopies. You know, those little polyps on the colon, you don't want those. I'm not faulting the station because they gotta feed 90 guys three times a day so it's not gonna be Martha Stewart and we're not gonna be having fresh leafy greens every day. It's not gonna be roughage, it's gonna be sawdust soaked in milk. Feed the cow, you know. No complaints! There's yogurt and cereal. But, three-four times a week it's pasta or rice; it's just too heavy on the carbs and it hasn't been helping me with my quest to drop a few pounds. (8 May 2010, interview)



Residents' abilities to eat food more conducive to running was complicated by preference, financial ability, and lack of both a balanced diet provided by The House and the means to store and prepare food.

A healthy and training-focused diet requires willpower and discipline (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2001; Atkinson, 2008; Bridel & Rail, 2007). Achieving this type of diet also requires the resources and preferences to do so. For those lacking the means to prepare or purchase food outside of The House, the 'sawdust soaked in milk' meals offered some nutritional value but were far less healthy than Non-Residents, whose food choices more closely aligned to those of the self-surveilling runner (Bridel & Rail, 2007). Those few who ate beyond the confines of The House expressed the contradictions of dietary preferences (e.g., double grease burger) weighed against healthier choices. Necessary for eating healthier were financial capacity, social networks, and knowledge to access necessary facilities to prepare food. Matthew exemplified these necessities, which are minimally available to those in The House, whereas Jeff illustrated the more common tendency of eating unhealthy meals once able to afford it. In Jeff's case, and for those eating at The House, they were unable or unwilling to self-regulate or self-surveil as would the ideal runner. While preference featured in food choices, Residents predominantly lacked the time and resources necessary for healthier, physically active diets. Pursuing a healthy diet makes clear the relative simplicity with which Residents clothed their bodies. Disciplining the body according to normative healthy ideals was successful to varying degrees, and even refuted. Outside of direct surveillance, Residents' lived experiences illustrate the limits of efforts to reshape the body. Nevertheless, running serves to centralize the body as a site of power and discipline.

## *Discipline and the Normalization of Pain and Injury*

The physicality of running requires strenuous bodily investment through the endurance of pain and suffering (Atkinson, 2008). One central feature of participants' experiences included the conscious decision to expose the body to physical challenges. When I met Stephen, he had only just begun to run. A black Baltimorean, he had previously abused alcohol and had been convicted of drug trafficking. He was faced with going to jail or The House. Because of his asthma, he was unable to maintain the steady pace for which runners strive. While running with him, his body seized up and he was immobilized whilst struggling to catch his breath during an attack (24 July 2012, field notes). Several times he bent over at the waist with his hands on his hips whilst wheezing and coughing. Every day, his running pace ebbed and flowed with the functioning of his respiratory system, which I asked him about:

*Stephen:* Running is hard on the bones. They don't rush you to run through hurt but the running feels good. Some times after you run for a while aches and pains feels good.

*Bryan:* Does it?

*Stephen:* Yeah, it does. It really feels good to me after I run for a period time. I say I'll work for the pain, I deserve that. That is a good feeling that you've earned. Sometimes when I run I got an asthma problem. I be huffing and puffing but I go boy, I can go... Deep, deep down inside you feel like you're running in the Olympics. I can go-go-go, everybody clapping at the end, that's what's good about Back on My Feet. (24 July 2012, interview)

Although his asthma pushed the physical limits of his body, he ran nonetheless and understood running as something that was 'very good for you.'

Relatedly, all participants understood pain and injury as part-and-parcel of running, to which Warren spoke directly. An African-American man in his early 60s, he had already run for several months before we met. His time in the military during Vietnam exposed him to several substances that made him 'messed up.' He served time in prison for selling drugs and burglary. Returning from jail after multiple stints, Veterans Affairs assisted him with going to The House for recovery. He shared:

*Warren:* What happened when I ran the first 10-miler? The thing is, I wasn't 20 but I still think I'm as good as I used to be. I pulled a muscle earlier and the knot was that big! *He laughed infectiously with a broad smile while he held up his fist shaking it.* Back on My Feet already entered me into the 10-miler so I had to run hurt. You know, I didn't want to waste the money. I took a couple of Motrin and ran the race. That was a painful experience.

*Bryan:* Yeah, 10 miles is not an easy task.

*Warren:* I did that in 2 hours and 51 minutes. But this year when I did the 10-miler I did it in 1 hour and 51 minutes. I was running without the pain. I was nice and healthy and I think I ran pretty well. (10 August 2011, interview)

In challenging the body at the limit of its capacities, pushing through pain, and working through how the body moved whilst running in order to reduce pain and injury, Residents normalized pain and injury. This is consistent with the literature on the running body (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2001; Bridel & Rail, 2007; Major, 2001; Shipway & Holloway, 2010; Yair, 1990). What is distinctive amongst Residents is that they would not readily identify as runners and their bodies present physical limitations

to introductory running levels. The normalization of pain and injury within running discourse calls forward practices of self-regulation.

Tulle (2007) submitted that running requires a kind of bodywork, which necessitates subjecting the body to careful and rigorous regulation. For elite runners, this occurs through heavy training loads, gym sessions, and several other methods of (self-)monitoring. For those just learning to run whose bodies do not function at ideal levels, this bodywork occurs in a different way. For some Residents, that work focused on distances from two to several miles, whereas for others this monitoring occurred over a few blocks. Bodily ailments, from weight to chronic injury to illness, featured Residents' *bodywork*. Rather than maximize the body's capacity over a distance in pursuit of a specific time, participants demonstrated the importance of participation in and completion of a run in the pursuit of a variety forms of perceived benefits. These included: health, such as cardiovascular health, reduced body fat, ameliorated heart disease or diabetes, lowered cholesterol or blood pressure; psychological, such as a sense of achievement, improved self-esteem, and positive outlook; and social, such as social interaction and relationships, and a sense of community. Pursuing these required participants to endure the body modification and self-regulation associated with running (Gillick, 1984; Major, 2001; Shipway & Holloway, 2010). In this way, Residents engaged in *running to recover*, or subjecting themselves to the disciplinary regimes of running in pursuit of physical, social, and psychological benefits. Participants' preparations and bodywork take on greater meaning when contextualized within homeless discourses.

### **The Significance of the (Running) Body within Homeless Discourses**

The body is instrumental for illustrating the relationship between social structures and subjective experience (Crossley, 1995; Wacquant, 2004; 2015). Participants' subjective accounts evoked discourses of the running body in pursuit of aforementioned benefits. In fabricating their bodies whilst learning to run participants did so also in relation to behavioral change, homeless discourses, and neoliberal rationalities.

*A 'Feel Good Pill': Running with Non-Residents*

*Bryan:* What do you mean by running starts the day off right?

*Ben:* You know, it's a lot of times the guys be down. They be down and it's kind of contagious. And then when you're around someone that's upbeat, full of energy, it gives you that boost, that moral support.

*Bryan:* When you say kinda down all the time, guys are down and it's contagious, how does that happen? What does that mean?

*Ben:* You see some guys that are down, not feeling up to it maybe. Kinda have the blue period, suffering from the blues or something like that. It kinda rubs off on you a bit.

*Bryan:* Can you expand on 'they're not up to it'?

*Ben:* Some of the guys [in The House] they are always down, it drains you. It's good to be around people that have some energy. Well it's a positive energy. Very positive energy. You can actually feel it when you get near them. It's contagious. It's like a feel good pill early in the morning. At least when I'm done it provides me energy. I'm kinda cranky a little bit until I get warmed up. (14 July 2010, interview)

Ben is a white man in his mid-to-late 40s whose life changed dramatically when he was convicted for second-degree murder. Upon release from prison, his further rehabilitation was court-mandated at The House. He aptly characterized the positive sentiment that Residents carried about Non-Residents. Moreover, Ben also compared social interactions between Non-Residents and Residents in The House who did and did not run:

*Bryan:* Can you tell me about the Residents that run in Back on My Feet?

*Ben:* They're pretty good guys. They're a little more upbeat than the other guys in here. Back on My Feet helps enough. You get that adrenaline fix in the morning and it lasts all day. It helps boost your attitude, your mood, and your metabolism. It seems like the guys in Back on My Feet work harder than the other guys.

*Bryan:* So why do you think some people come to join and why some do not?

*Ben:* Basically, it's they don't want to get involved. Laziness, the ones that don't join are pretty lazy. About all they do is go downstairs and eat breakfast, sit around all day. Some of them aren't capable of it, they may have a physical handicap, they may not be able to run. But some it's just laziness.

*Bryan:* Yeah?

*Ben:* Yeah, the guys on Back on My Feet are the ones who have a better attitude and how to handle things around here.

Ben conveyed at least four notable sentiments. First, his description of running with Non-Residents and the energy they bring as a 'feel good pill' communicated how running was not exclusively about physiological dimensions but also social and behavioral. As behavioral exemplars, Residents regarded Non-Residents as 'positive,'

'happy,' 'good,' 'encouraging,' or 'inspirational' people who were 'doing the right things' in their lives.' Residents' understandings of Non-Residents disclosed both strategies of power and techniques of the self. The strategy of power in this non-coercive form is less about being dominated and more about how power manifests through practices regularly undertaken (Foucault, 1977; 1978), ways of governing the self. Ben illustrated how the monitoring and maintenance of the body forged it as a project (Shilling, 2003), one that could be reshaped with individual identity. Running was a way of training the self with and through the body, thus embodying the disciplinary regimes of the organization.

Second, one of the challenges facing Residents was the environment of The House. In the 90-bed facility, space between people was tight and opportunities for privacy were rare. Matthew expressed his experience: "The house ain't always peaches and cream, ya know. There's people that have demons. We are so tightly packed so that if one guy is really off the hook it affects us all mentally" (8 May 2010, interview). Residents understood The House as a space of transition and recovery that required negotiating many people and conditions with little to no personal space. Whereas Non-Residents featured as behavioral guides in some ways, the conditions in The House were understood as a place that could cultivate psychologically and socially undesirable behaviors.

Third, Ben articulated those physically unable to run as unable to participate. The opportunity for pursuing benefits through running cleaves apart those in various forms of recovery according to bodily ability. This separation highlights the debilitating and vulnerable status of 'homeless' and the importance and value of bodily ability within

social life. Fourth, and relatedly, Ben descried those that run as ‘working harder’ than those that do not, and those that do not run, yet are able to, as ‘lazy.’ Dominant and stereotypical contemporary representations articulate homelessness to meanings of dependency, laziness, or incapability (Amster, 2003; Del Casino & Jocoy, 2008; Kusmer, 2002; Wright, 1997). Ben elicited the dominant discursive framing of homelessness based partly on whether others in The House could, could not, did, or did not run. In conjunction with the ways in which Residents monitored their bodies, they articulated their running with behavioral change, one used to distinguish runners from other recovering men at The House.

#### *The Moral Worth of Sweat and The Politics of (In)Visibility*

Back on My Feet offered a complimentary program to running called ‘Next-Steps.’ The program provides opportunities for educational and job training, financial literacy, job partnerships, housing programs, and up to \$1,250 in financial assistance for ‘moving lives forward’ in ways that are ‘self-sustainable’ (Back on My Feet, 2012). To access this, Residents were required to maintain 90% monthly attendance and a positive attitude. Additionally, Residents’ mileage was recorded to track progression, which resulted in additional prizes for accrual, such as hats, t-shirts, or watches, at mileage markers of 50, 100, 250, and 500 miles. Endurance in the program was thus stitched to the potential for accessing benefits.

In addition to preparing and disciplining their bodies, Residents spoke of the ways in which they constructed notions of responsibility. Reed, an African-American man in his late 50s recovering from cocaine and heroin use, captured this succinctly. He discussed



the relationship between the physicality of running, its requisite regulation, and a sense of self:

Back on My Feet has let me know that through physical endurance, through mental discipline, that it doesn't really matter how you are, you can get some things done. Cause since I've been running I do feel a lot better about myself and my outlook. (21 July 2010, interview)

Amongst the services and opportunities presented through The House and Back on My Feet, Residents reiterated a sense of self-responsibility necessary for recovery.

Stephen's attitude portrayed this:

It's up to me. This is up to me. This program is not going to save my life, it's just giving me a chance to start fresh, to get out there. Ain't nobody can save myself but myself. It's my responsibility to my self, to our selves. How many chances you get, it depends on you. You might not have a chance to come back here again, you might not. (24 July 2012, interview)

Their words connect the physical dimensions of running to the notion of self-responsibility. Evidently, the Non-Resident with whom I first ran was correct in her position about Residents and the values instilled through running: 'we're giving them a new addiction' (10 March 2010, field notes).

The understanding that Residents developed in relation to responsibility are of critical import in relation to homeless discourses. Residents articulated a way of *running for recovery*: They ran in order to access the means of recovery, such as information, housing assistance, education, or financial incentive. Following Foucault (1977), a disciplinary apparatus controls activity, organizes a progression built on a series of repetition, and monitors behaviors. Organizationally, Back on My Feet exhibits how

these mechanisms inform who becomes eligible for receiving assistance and who does not. The physical ability to run, attendance requirements, and mileage tracking all speak to the ways in which the organization forms a disciplinary structure focused on the (in)active body. Participation for those underserved is frequently tied to codes of conduct or mandatory attendance (Hartmann, 2001; Pitter & Andrews, 1997) in contrast to participant-driven demands accessible in the marketplace. In addition to physical and behavioral modification, Back on My Feet sutures to running the means of recovery.

*Running for recovery* compliments and overlaps with *running to recover*; Running was both a technique of self-care and discipline (Markula & Pringle, 2006). As homelessness became rooted in poverty during the 1980s, it began to revolve around frameworks of innocence/guilt and worthiness/unworthiness (Borchard, 2010; Kusmer, 2002; Rossi, 1989; Shlay, 1994). Those adopting personal characteristics or lifestyles deemed to contribute to their plight, such as the addict or criminal, were deemed unworthy. Whereas those considered ‘victims’ and forced into poverty were worthy of assistance. Residents demonstrated through running their worth for assistance, which can assist in their recovery. As Ben exhibited previously, Residents did so in ways that distinguished themselves amongst their peers in The House. As they accumulated rewards and benefits, those who ran for several months or more began to articulate their involvement directly to ideas of self-responsibility.

Residents’ understandings of self in relation to running demonstrated clear affinities with neoliberal rationalities—acknowledging the impossibility of definitively asserting that Residents adopted self-responsibility and self-sufficiency entirely. Edwin, who was

recovering from heroin addiction and was court appointed at The House, illustrated these sensibilities. During our formal discussion (18 July 2012, interview), we spoke about what should be provided for people within society. His response was telling: 'Air. Other than that, nothing's free.' 'Should there be?', I replied. He continued:

Nah. Everything comes at a price to somebody, so if it's free for me then somebody paid for it. Food, housing, everything. I mean 1-12 education is free for the most part. After that should college be free? Hmmm... it would help. I don't know. ... A house, for free? Who's gonna build it? ... Somebody's gotta foot the bill for all that stuff. Government? Government's broke. So who foots that bill?

Residents communicated that supportive opportunities were few and they adhered to the ethos of pulling themselves up by the *shoelaces*. Their experience draws attention to the preoccupation with the human body as a site to be mobilized in response to state welfare retrenchment (Fusco, 2006; Howell & Ingham, 2001; Ingham, 1985; White, Young, & Gillett, 1995). Public and social issues in competitive, capitalist contexts are framed through *personal*, moral responsibilities wherein the body becomes a primary locus for working through issues such as health and wellness. Sport and exercise initiatives embedded in political discourses of at-risk urban youth in relation to crime, delinquency, and public safety, like Midnight Basketball (Hartmann, 2001), tend to orient around prevention. Back on My Feet may partially function as a mechanism of prevention, yet in its emphasis on the production of appropriate human behavior within a neoliberal context, of producing the self-governing individual, it is more fittingly considered a disciplinary technology. Within liberal, capitalist democracies, individuals are morally responsible for making themselves competitive in the marketplace. On the fringes of employment, Residents drew on running as a form of physical labor to render themselves more productive and competitive. With an aim towards self-sufficiency and

self-care, Back on My Feet encourages those on the margins from thinking about, needing, or requiring institutional, state, or non-state care.

Such expressions of self-responsibility from those at the margins of social life are disconcerting for issues of (in)visibility, which Shipler (2004) asserted are vital for understanding the reproduction of inequality amongst the working poor. Miller (1991) suggested that ‘the homeless body’ is both visible and invisible. The policies and practices of sweeping away, clearing out, or prohibiting those experiencing homelessness renders them *invisible*, what Mitchell (1997) referred to as ‘annihilation by space.’ Yet, those on the margins of urban life are made *visible* through their juxtaposition against what is considered acceptable within spectacularized urban space (Kawash, 1998; Amster, 2003; Gerrard and Farrugia, 2015). In demonstrating practices of self-regulation, self-care, and thus worthiness of assistance, Residents’ bodies and selves, were made visible through normative proprietary understandings. An ideal instance of this happened to Edwin during a court hearing:

I was at court and my probation officer knows that I run. I guess she had written something in my files and the judge made reference to it. I let them know who I was running with and the lawyer who handled all the drug court people—I know her face though because I see her every five or six weeks when I’m in court, and she’s representing me for lack of a better term—she and one of the court clerks, which is another female, they clapped and was like ‘Back On My Feet!’ (18 July, interview)

Through a piece of documentation in his legal record, running contributed to the narrative that Edwin was *working* in a respected, positive, and civil way towards recovery. Here, ‘the running body’ eclipses ‘the homeless body.’ Edwin was represented

in conjunction less with the spectre of homelessness and more with competitiveness and productivity. Since completing a marathon with Edwin—a first for both of us—I learned through continued correspondence that he successfully moved on from The House, ran irregularly and independently, completed training for and accepted a job at a Veteran’s medical facility, and stayed clean for more than five years. Like others on the margin, Residents engaged in rational, irrational, or imaginary pursuits outside of the dominant institutions from which they have been excluded (Scherer, Koch, & Holt, 2016), which are indicators of struggle, resistance, or survival.

Yet, in as much as Edwin represents the archetypal impact that Back on My Feet can produce, other stories challenge that narrative. A case in point was Jeff, a recovering alcoholic who was sober for more than a year when I met him and captain of the Residents—a role responsible for communicating between organizers and Resident members. Upon the death of his father, he relapsed with alcohol and was forced to leave The House and thus the running team (field notes, 2 March 2011; email correspondence, 7 March 2011). When initially asked how he was doing, Amie said they had no way to reach him but they heard he was seeking entry into another recovery facility (field notes, 2 March, 2011). Later, we learned that he was successful in doing so (email correspondence, 7 March 2011). That the engagement with the organization, its people, and its opportunities are reactively withdrawn speaks to the politicized and moralized construction of homelessness. Having broken a moral code and polluted his body, Jeff’s ability to access resources for recovery, or even run for them, were withdrawn by his expulsion from The House and Back on My Feet. The latter is compelling because the organization is not tied to a location, place, or formal institutional apparatus and can thus operate beyond the regulatory confines of a

recovery facility. Yet, it elects not to do so. Arguably, when someone in recovery was most in need responsibility shifted heavily back on to the individual.

### **Conclusion: Running on...**

Residents' lived experiences with Back on My Feet demonstrated ways in which the body became a site of the working of power. In one form, the practice of running created opportunities for self-care. Improving health, developing relationships, the pleasure of running, or accessing vital entry points for invaluable resources in the process of recovering from homelessness (Scherer, Holt, & Koch, 2016) validate the program's intentions. Yet, the disciplinary apparatus orchestrated by the organization also fosters the production of behaviors and subjects conducive to the context of homelessness within neoliberalism.

Back on My Feet exemplifies the expanding ways in which responsibility for social care since the 1980s continues to shift responsibility for public good away from the state to the non-governmental, local, communal, and individual (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Wacquant, 2008; Wolch, 1990); this shift is frequently facilitated by not-for-profit sport and physical activity organizations in urban areas that target those on the extreme margins who are often people of color (Hartmann, 2016). Targeting specific groups invokes specific associative discourses. In the case of Back on My Feet, discourses of 'the homeless body' and 'the running body' served to: moralize the practice of running as a means of rendering those on the extreme margin visible in 'productive' capacities and thus deserving of assistance; cleave apart those who run from those who do not, thus delineating who can receive care; reproduce discourses positioning the homeless as

lazy, dependent, or incapable even amongst those in recovery; and ultimately produce subjects who evince the self-sufficient and self-responsible ethos of neoliberalism.

*Running for recovery* reconfigures running as a controlling, regulating, and disciplining active practice (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Spaaij, 2009).

Initiatives that emphasize and focus upon the individual are problematic for just this reason: They engender largely symbolic and behavioral solutions to what are powerful and systemic forces and causes of inequalities. Back on My Feet reifies the idea that issues related to the causes of homelessness—such as crime, unemployment, substance abuse, racism, deindustrialization, disability, mental illness, poverty, or physical abuse—are not public social issues shared amongst a populace but rather issues of self-care (Lemke, 2001), which resonate with neoliberal techniques of governance. This reaffirms how sport and exercise initiatives, Sport Development programs, or Positive Youth Development endeavors in targeting ‘at-risk’ groups risk (re)producing paternalistic values and moralized discourses that position people as problems to be solved. For any that study, volunteer with, organize, or participate in some capacity with such initiatives, attention must be paid to motivations that appear positive, compassionate, and progressive but also may be rooted in bias, fear, or pejorative ascriptions and the desire to dominate or control (Hartman, 2012). Locating and articulating the ways in which the body moves, participates, is experienced, and is discursively constituted within specific contexts can be helpful in this vital task.

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<sup>1</sup> As of 2016, Back on My Feet reformed its mission statement twice. In 2012, the statement changed to the following: 'Back On My Feet is a national for-purpose 501(c)3 organization that uses running to help those experiencing homelessness transform their own lives and achieve employment and independent living.' As of 2016, the mission statement read: 'Back on My Feet, a national organization operating in 11 major cities coast to coast, combats homelessness through the power of running, community support and essential employment and housing resources.'

<sup>2</sup> Ethnography's claims to the 'real,' like all qualitative inquiries, are always negotiated through the voice of the author. I reflected on my position in the research process through my relation to the body and identity (Giardina & Newman, 2011; Clift & Bustad, 2018), my relationship to participants, our experiential differences, and my unease with charity and voluntarism (Clift, 2014). As with any ethnographic account, looking at or seeing something comes at the expense of looking at or seeing something else (Wolcott, 2008). My approach was contoured in several ways by, for example: the ephemeral nature of the organization and thus limited time in the field; the city and site in which I worked; and my knowledge, experience, and theoretical inclinations. The 'ethnographic I' is brought to bear here—a deviation from ethnography's objectivist, traditional roots (Ellis, 2004; Emerson, 2001; Van Maanen, 2011; Wolcott, 2008)—and embraces interpretivist approaches (Denzin, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Thematic Analysis (TA) was used because it is a robust process for identifying patterns across a data set and allows for theoretical and paradigmatic flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA facilitated the empirical and conceptual linkage of participants' experiences to the historical and cultural context out of which they take shape. Codes were developed from multiple readings, acknowledging that codes and themes do not simply 'emerge' from nowhere within data. Data extracts represent the themes around which analytical narratives were written. Across the analytical discussion, themes were further interpreted and braided together with literature.



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