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SELF-IDENTITY PROCESSES IN ADULT FEMALE  
RUNNING ENTHUSIASTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON  
SELF-ESTEEM AND CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR

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Dissertation submitted as part requirement  
for the degree of Masters of Arts in Marketing  
of the University of Durham 2014

**Declaration**

This dissertation is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of others, which is referred to in the dissertation, is credited to the author in question in the text. The dissertation is 12,041 words in length. Research ethics issues have been considered and handled appropriately within the Durham Business School guidelines and procedures.

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## **Abstract**

The positive benefits of goal achievement, cardiovascular fitness and weight loss associated with intense exercise together with the social benefits of running group membership, have spawned a growing community of adult female running enthusiasts. Whilst the known endorphin rush provides a biochemical explanation of its immediate psychological benefits, there appears to be a broader spectrum of self-identity motivations and rewards driving participation. Employing an interpretivist approach enthusiast running is explored through the lens of self-identity and self-esteem.

The research employs semi-structured depth interviews to explore these motivations and behaviours and the drivers of participation frequency. The research also explores the identity and self-esteem rewards that result from commitment to high levels of participation and its value to individual runners. Finally the implication for marketing is explored in light of the findings with reference to the role of running brands in the life of the runners.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Several bodies of evidence from different fields have been drawn together in creating this study of what drives behaviour in adult female running enthusiasts. Psychology and social psychology provide important understanding of how self-motives influence behaviour to maintain or enhance self-esteem. Secondly sports psychology has been utilised to provide more specific input to help explain these motivations using theories such as body self-schema, goal achievement motivation and self-efficacy. Finally the links between self-esteem and sports brand consumption are explored. Together these fields of study provide new insight to explain runner behaviour, the underlying motivations that drive high levels of participation frequency and commitment and the consumption drivers of sport brand apparel.

### **1.2 Background**

The breadth and depth of research work covering self-esteem and the role of self-processes is extensive spanning an array of human cognition and behavioural perspectives. (Leary and Tangney, 2012) categorises these into ‘attentional’ processes (the directing of conscious self-attention), ‘cognitive processes’ (consciously thinking about oneself), ‘executive processes’ (the regulation of current and future behaviour), ‘self-conscious emotions’ (such as shame, guilt and pride), ‘self-motives’ (designed to enhance or protect self-esteem) and self-constructs and processes (such as self-esteem and self-monitoring).

Amongst these aspects of the self, the protection and enhancement of self-esteem holds the most potential to explain the motivations driving behaviour. Initial descriptions of self-esteem centred on its promotion of positive affect and the buffering against stress and other negative emotions (Leary, *et al.*, 1995). Leary’s own more recent theory suggests that self-esteem functions as a ‘sociometer’ motivating the individual to behave in ways that minimises the probability of rejection or exclusion (Leary, 1995; 2010). Leary’s sociometer theory however is not uncontested. Greenburg (2008) for example posits that the sociometer theory cannot explain why people strive to be great rather than to just be accepted. Whatever the prevailing theory there appears to be strong consensus that there are distinct self-motives implicated within self-esteem regulation.

### 1.3 Research objectives

Although a reasonable volume of self-identity research exists within sport, running has received relatively little specific attention. In particular the self-motives that drive running participation and the mechanism for esteem enhancement seem poorly represented in the literature. This dissertation looks to explore how this mechanism operates within the adult female running community and has the following research objectives at its core.

Firstly it explores the range of self-motives in-play within adult female runners, and their effect on participation. Secondly the research explores the role of state and trait self-esteem in driving these self-motives. Thirdly the research looks to understand how effectively running is able to provide a context in which these self-motives can be satisfied. Finally it explores the role self-motives in running brand consumption.

### 1.4 Key research issues

From the literature, it is clear that a great deal of knowledge exists in the area of self-esteem and the role of self-motives. Before moving on to the literature review it is worth noting some of issues it was hoped that this research would answer:

**Self-affirmation:** (Steele, Spencer and Lynch, 1993) provides a framework for understanding self-affirmation and its role in maintaining the integrity of the self to counter external threats. Does running provide a shelter from esteem damage?

**Self-categorisation:** (Abrams, *et al.*, 1990) provides evidence for the role of self-categorisation in helping individuals align their identities with group membership and hence strengthen their sense of in-group connection and self-esteem. Do runners actively self-categorise?

**Physical-self:** (Fox and Corbin, 1989) in developing the ‘Physical Self Perception Profile demonstrated a clear link between perceived physical-self and global self-esteem. How does the weight loss and increased musculature associated with high frequency running participation influence physical self-perception and ultimately a runner’s global self-esteem?



**Self-Efficacy:** Self-efficacy within sport plays a vital role in motivation, performance and sense of control (Bandura 1982). It has also been shown to have an influence in elevating levels of self-esteem (Sonstroem, Speliotis and Fava, 1992). With many of the sample frame exhibiting high levels of running confidence was a significant self-esteem benefit observed? Was this consistent across the group?

**Self-evaluation:** Running provides a fertile resource for individuals to employ self-assessment, self-enhancement and self-verification. Of these alternatives self-enhancement represents a dominant motivation (Sedikides, 1993). Which of these self-motives were dominant within running and what was their effect on self-esteem?

**Self-worth:** “Whereas self-esteem is based on competencies for some people, for others, it may be based on the (real or imagined) approval or disapproval they receive from others” (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001). Does some of the running cohort suffer from these contingency traps and how does it influence their running motivations?

## **1.5 Research methods**

Every runner’s personal journey is unique. It represents a socially constructed world where personal history, interactions and belief sets and attitudes determine reality. It was important that an interpretivist approach was adopted in the research and that the experiences and attitudes of individuals within their own lived experience of running was encourage to come to the surface. The individual depth interviews provided the ideal setting for this elaboration and sharing of thought to take place.

## **1.6 Overview of dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter two the literature review now follows and explores the theoretical knowledge, frameworks and insights drawn from previous research regarding relevant aspects of the self. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding how self-identify goals may drive sports participation the evidence implicating self-esteem as the source of motivation and the facilitating role played by self-motives. Chapter three introduces the research questions and how they are used to form the basic framework of this dissertation. Chapters four and five describe the methodologies, results and analysis that took place during the research phase.

Chapter six pulls it all together, synthesising the output with existing theory to create a series of insight and possible hypotheses regarding the role of self-motives and self-esteem. Chapter seven the conclusion discusses the theoretical implications, and the insights for sports brand marketing. It also highlights the limitations of this research and where future investigation might provide still further understanding.

## **1.7 Summary**

This introductory chapter has set the context for the dissertation and highlighted the academic fields from which insight has been drawn. It has placed self-esteem and self-motives firmly at the heart of the research and summarised the key issues this dissertation is looking to address.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In attempting to uncover the motivations that could drive enthusiast running participation this literature review spans several key areas of study regarding the self.

**The first section** looks to provide context for the discussions of the results to be ensure they are grounded in well-established theory and frameworks of the self. It is split into three areas: Firstly the theories that explain the structure and dimensions of the self-concept. Secondly a review of research regarding the mechanisms and role of self-esteem and the concept of linked contingencies within self-worth. Thirdly the role of self-motives in protecting and enhancing self-esteem.

**The second section** provides a more specific sport and exercise focus looking at the models and theories that explain the relationship between sport and self-esteem. In particular the components of the physical self are explored and how body image plays a key role in directing female athlete's self-esteem goals. Finally the types and role of motivation are discussed and its relationship to self-esteem.

*Section 1:*

### **2.2 The role of the self-concept**

“Our self-concepts are multi-faceted hierarchical cognitive structures as shown in figure 1 and described by (Marsh and Shavelson, 1985). Self-concepts can include content, attitudes, or evaluative judgements that are used to make sense of the world, focus our attention on goals and protect our sense of self worth (Oyserman and Markus, 1998).

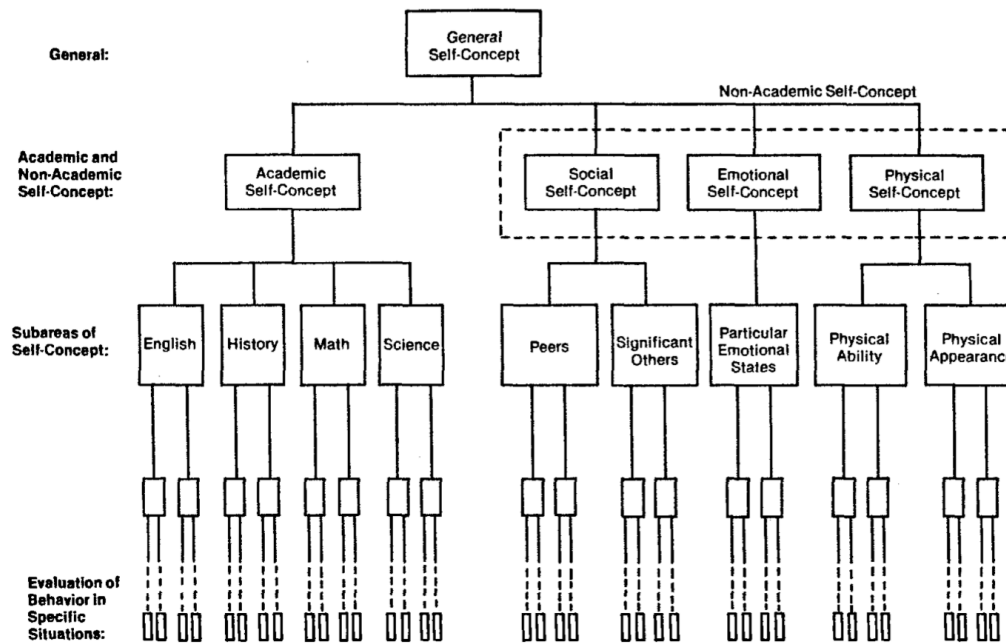


Figure 1: Structure of self-concept (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976)

A popular view is that these structures exist as cognitive generalizations or self-schemas that organize and guide our processing and internalisation of events (Markus, Crane, Bernstein and Siladi, 1982).

The self-concept is also a dynamic and forceful influence and is both capable of change and adjusting in response to the social environment (Markus and Wurf 1987). At an intra-personal level it can affect our information processing (Markus, Smith, and Moreland, 1985), modify self-regulation (Higgins, 1997) and our motivations for action (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Self-concept influence also extends to an inter-personal level influencing for example our interaction strategies to determine possible self-presentational styles (Baumeister, Tice and Hutton, 1989), our reactions to feedback (Swann, 1984) and perhaps unsurprisingly our romantic partnerships (Aron, Paris, and Aron, 1995).

The self-concept can originate from a variety of sources, hold different levels of importance and are elaborated to differing levels depending on their centrality to our overall self-concept. Some are highly salient, others peripheral and less highly elaborated (Markus and Wurf 1987) The self-concept has also been shown to have a temporal component with (Markus and Nurius, 1986) describing the ‘possible self’ as representing the hopes, fears, goals and threats that can influence and drive future behaviour.

Self-representations can be positive or negative with substantial evidence supporting the link between levels of self-esteem and the presence of significantly positive or negative self-schemas within individuals (Markus and Wurf 1987). However it is appears unclear whether the presence of negative self-schema within non-depressed individuals is always associated with lower esteem or used more positively as a coping strategy and catalyst for self-improvement.

To complete this brief review of the self-concept and for it to be valuable input into the discussions of the results we need to review two issues related to the self-concept. Firstly what are the sources of self-representation on which self-concepts are based? Secondly what are the mechanisms by which an individual's self-concept influences and controls behaviour?

**Sources of self-representation:** Self-representation has numerous potential sources. Some judge their own attitudes and dispositions while watching their actions to make assumptions of their self-concept (Markus and Wurf 1987). However Andersen and Ross (1984) however believe that thoughts and feelings have greater valence in influencing how people view themselves than do behaviours and are more “diagnostic of the inner or real self”. Individuals may also seek to verify their self-conceptions by actively eliciting social feedback that confirms their self-conception beliefs (Swann, and Read, 1981). They describe both every day self-verification as compared to crisis attempts, which are elicited when “interaction partners’ appraisals were inconsistent”.

Finally a powerful source of insight for individuals to learn about themselves is through the process of social comparison. Rather fittingly Festinger (1954) wrote “thus if a person evaluates his running ability, he will do so by comparing his time to run some distance with the times that other persons have taken”.

**Self-regulation:** Whilst external influences such as culture can influence perception and modify behaviour (Markus and Kitayama, 1991), ultimately it is the individual's self-concept that exerts the most fundamental effect over his or her behaviour (Markus and Wurf 1987). The concept of self-regulation describes the directing and regulating of an individual's behaviour in pursuit of personal goals. These goals can be rational or emotional and can have either a promotional focus linked to accomplishments and aspirations or a prevention focus linked to safety and responsibility (Higgins, 1997). Goal setting also plays an important role in motivation both in general and specifically

in sport. The expectancy of success or self-belief that the individual is capable of achieving specific goals has been extensively studied within the framework of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Highly relevant is the recognised link between goal achievement and positive mental health (Mcgregor and Little, 1998). This was shown to be a significant factor in the happiness through its contribute to the esteem levels of individuals.

## **2.3 The role of self-esteem**

Self-esteem can be defined as our evaluative judgment of ourselves. Early work by (James, 1890) highlighted the differences between the ‘trait’ of self-esteem, this being an individual’s inherent level of average global self-esteem. This compared to ‘state’ self-esteem, which is dependent on the current level of success or failure in a relevant and personal goal. Having a high self-esteem is considered to be one of the most important contributors to mental health (Chamberlain and Haaga, 2001) and a significant driver of behavior across a broad spectrum of human activities (Fox, Biddle, and Boutcher, 2001). It relates powerfully to the way we emotionally experience life events for example increasing or decreasing positive affect after success and reduces or increasing negative affect after failure (Greenberg, 2008).

Self-esteem is also a highly structured and hierarchical self-concept, with specific self-esteem attributions given to certain areas within individual’s lives. (Rosenberg et al., 1995). It can be measured (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992) and is portrayed as a highly valued asset, which is linked to “enhanced initiative and pleasant feelings” (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Crocker and Wolfe (2001) describe how self-esteem maintenance can sometimes rely on specific goal achievement creating a contingency for self-worth within the individual. Such goal achievement focus has become increasingly socialised into western cultures especially within children. This can tend to promote more volatile levels of self-esteem and in some cases lead to depression and poor health when self-affirmation resources are not available (Steele, 1988). Moreover, motivation to follow contingency dependant goals can create behaviour driven by ‘prove’ rather than ‘learn’ (Baumeister and Tice, 1985). This can ultimately stunt more healthy forms of behavioural and cognitive development and lead to a reduction rather than an increase in self-esteem levels (Park and Crocker, 2005).

The positive feelings and lowering of anxiety associated with achievement of contingency goals can also become addictive. Baumeister and Vohs (2001) describe how the narcissist stereotype might in fact be an individual driven by the “yielding to inner urges in a way that that prove destructive and costly”. For individuals with chronically low esteem feeling constantly at risk of exclusion from social groups is common and can promote contingency dependant behaviour (Leary and Baumeister, 2000).

The development of non-contingent self-esteem or what is called in layman’s terms ‘learning to love thyself’ is of great value to positive mental health and appeared to rank with respondents as a highly valued personal goal. (Deci and Ryan, 2000) in their work on self-determination describe the value of goals driven by non-contingent motivations that relate to an individual’s “true self esteem”. These are seen as having a more beneficial long-term effect on mental health. The role of running in seeming to provide an “untouchable” contingent-free personal space appears to offer a potential vehicle for achieving this.

Discussions so far have focussed on the role of goal achievement in influencing self-esteem levels. However much research has also been directed towards understanding why it is that not all individuals are at the same mercy of contingency based self-esteem. It has been shown to relate to significant individual variations in levels of trait self-esteem within individuals. There are a number of theories relating to how this trait self-esteem develops. These include the striving for social dominance (Barkow, 1980), self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), and terror management theory describing our fear of mortality (Greenberg, 2008). However a more universally accepted view the ‘sociometer theory’ (Leary and Baumeister, 2000) relies on the theoretical argument that we need to cultivate group belongingness ties in order to survive. Our trait self-esteem reflects our overall success or failure in this regard during our life based on experiences with parents peer groups and significant others. Through the positive feelings associated with it’s increase and painfulness when it is reduced, we are motivated towards more social connectivity and hence from an evolutionary point of view survival.

Trait self-esteem appears to correlate negatively with both scores for anxiety (Battle et al., 1988), and how frequently individuals experience aversive emotions (Watson and

Clark, 1984). However encouragingly for individuals suffering from low trait self-esteem are the findings that a source of positive self-worth such as running group belonging and running skills mastery can over time elevate global self-esteem levels, and increase social confidence (Macdonald, Saltzman and Leary 2003).

## **2.4 The role of self-motives in protecting and enhancing self-esteem**

As we have seen and numerous researchers have demonstrated, the loss of self-esteem whatever its evolutionary purpose is a painful experience (Leary and Baumeister, 2000). Consequently individuals are often highly motivated to maximise experiences that raise or protect their self-esteem, while avoiding situations where they may suffer esteem reduction or damage (Alicke, and Sedikides, 2009). These threats to self-esteem can come from anywhere in life. They may be explicit where individuals receive direct negative feedback or implicit where a socialised standard has been perceived to have not been met. There are two distinct motives that are covered within the literature. The first '*self-enhancement*' represents a day-to-day bias that individuals employ to consistently raise their self-esteem (Wilson and Ross, 2001). This bias can include the perception of evaluators contingent on whether they provide positive or negative feedback, or the self-handicapping that prevents failure reflecting on the individual's self-esteem (Leary, M. R. 2007).

However whilst self-enhancement is widely covered within the texts, the observations within these research results appears to indicate that '*self-protection*' is a more frequent self-motive within the running community than self-enhancement. Self-protection represents a motive elicited in response to a specific and more direct self-threat to an individuals self-concept or self-esteem. Self-threats can include negative feedback from a valued peer, failing to achieve one's own internal standard or the belief that one has been excluded from an important social group. In response individuals can exhibit a raft of self-protection mechanisms including self-protection strivings (Alicke and Sedikides, 2009), employ psychological buffers such as self-affirmation (Steele, 1988) or one of a number of self-evaluation motives such as self-assessment or self-verification.



The initial watch-out list for self-motives implicated within esteem-protection and enhancement were drawn from Leary and Tangney (2012) who list sixty-six self-related constructs processes and phenomena! Rather than try to list as many as possible within the space, the following contextually relevant descriptions of self-motives represent those that were highly prevalent amongst respondents and for which running seemed to play a key role.

### **Self-expansion**

The concept of self-expansion proposes that there is a core motivation for people to increase their physical and social resources and consequently their perspectives and identities (Aron, Aron, and Norman, 2001). Seen within this research was a strong sense of group membership benefit and self-categorisation. This is highlighted by (Baumeister, Dori, and Hastings, 1998) who propose that expansion of goal achievements can provide proven self-esteem and anxiety reduction benefits.

### **Self-evaluation**

Self-evaluation is a fundamental motivator of human behaviour. The search for cohesive and consistent self-awareness promotes self-regulation and allows for the efficient processing of self-relevant information. On the other hand individuals with low self-concept clarity have clouded notions of who they are and suffer rumination and ultimately low self-esteem Leary and Tangney (2012). Individuals seeking self-concept clarity will be motivated to look to reduce uncertainty by obtaining an accurate and objective view of themselves in a self-diagnostic task high in specificity and comparative with to similar others (Sedikides, 1993). As we will see later, running provides multiple opportunities through race performance, competitive training times and achievement of personal bests to deliver objective and comparative self-evaluation feedback influencing self-perception, providing a source of self-affirmation and ultimately influencing self-esteem.

**Self-affirmation**

The basic premise of self-affirmation is that an affirmation of self-integrity, unrelated to a self-threat, can reduce the normal response to that threat reducing the loss of self-esteem. A key aspect of self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) is that people are motivated to protect their perceived integrity and worth of the self. These self-concepts are important to an individual, and may form the different contingencies of the individual's self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

(Heine and Dehman, 1997) suggest there are four pillars to the framework of self-affirmation: Firstly that people are motivated to protect the perceived integrity of their self-worth. Secondly motivations to protect self-integrity can result in defensive responses. Thirdly that the self-system is flexible and people will compensate for failures in one aspect of their lives by emphasizing successes in other domain. Fourthly People can be affirmed by engaging in activities that remind them of "who they are" and in doing so reduce the implications for their self-integrity from the threat. As will be discussed later within the results it appears that the runners with lower self-esteem or more contingent based self-worth were found to retreat into self-verification more readily as a form of self-esteem protection.

**Self-categorisation**

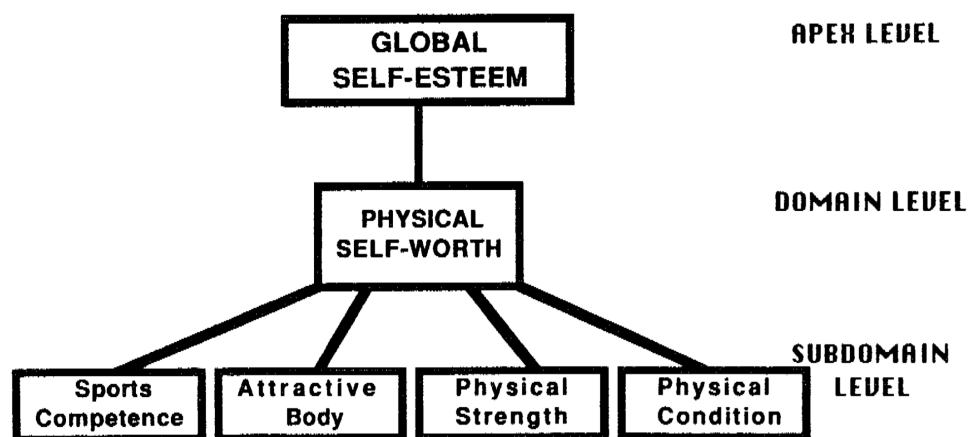
In addition to personal identity, individuals look to build a coherent sense of their own social identity. Through the process of social categorisation and group belonging, individuals are able to reduce the uncertainty about ourselves and others, and look for similarities within members of the same in-group while defining differences to those in the out-group (Hogg and Abrams, 1990). This sense of group status is important for self-esteem (Crocker, 1999), which can be damage if individuals perceive they are stigmatised or feel disconnected from relevant social groupings (Baumeister, Dori and Hastings, 1998). The level of running group cohesion observed within the research and the willingness of participants to articulate commonality with in-group members while distancing themselves from less serious runners appeared to confirm the presence of multiple instances of self-categorisation within the respondent group.

## Section 2:

### ***2.5 The physical self-concept***

As well as a construct for influencing cognition and behaviour in everyday life, many aspects of the self directly impacts the attitudes, motivations, and performance within sport. Self-esteem can be particularly influential driving commitment, self-efficacy and the focus of self-determination (Hein and Hagger, 2007). With the growing recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of self-esteem came the interest in how self-esteem and the physical-self were interconnected and where and how they exerted influence on the global self-esteem of the individual.

Building on the esteem framework of (Marsh and Shavelson, 1985), and related competency research, (Fox and Corbin, 1989) created the physical self-esteem profile encompassing sports competence, physical condition, body attractiveness and physical strength. This like previous esteem models was arranged within a hierarchical structure and is shown below in figure 2.



*Figure 2: Fox & Corbin (1989) Multi-dimensional & hierarchical model of self-esteem*

What is more, the hierarchical nature of the framework with specific competency domains feeding upwards also allows for the downward elaboration of specific mastery skills. The model below (figure 3) shows how this might be adapted for running using the Fox and Corbin framework.

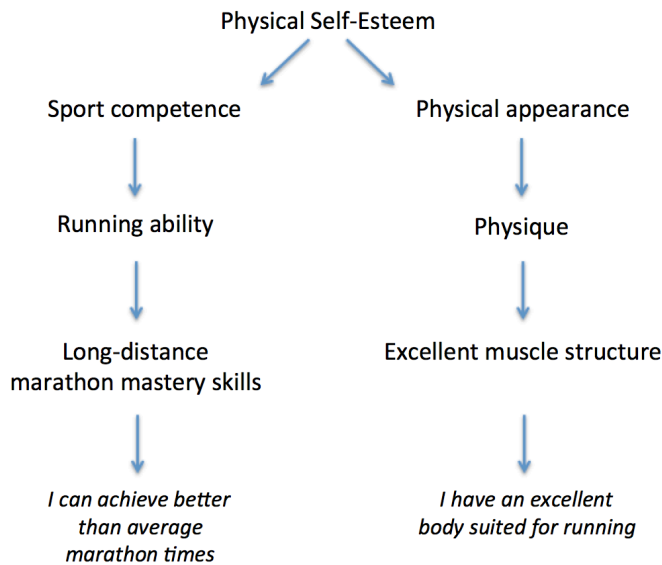


Figure 3: Example in two domains of sub-facets of physical self-esteem hierarchy. (Adapted from Fox & Corbin 1989)

Whilst the Fox and Corbin model shows the self-esteem structures and their inter-relationships, and despite the more sophisticated models that followed, none explained how and why the effects on self-esteem occurred. However Sonstroem and Morgan (1989) proposed a model that showed the relationship between exercise, physical competence and self-esteem. They explained that the situational experience of participation created dynamics of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) this influences physical competence and consequently physical acceptance, both of which feed positively into self-esteem. The model is shown below in figure 4.

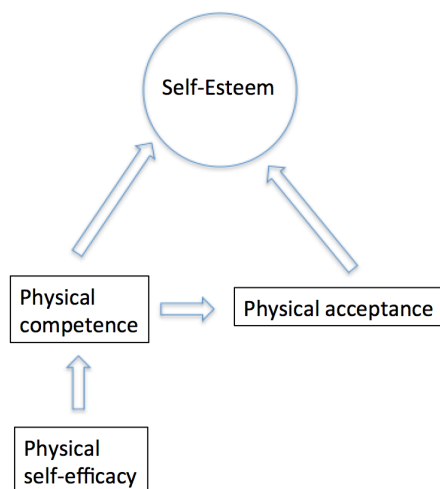


Figure 4: Exercise and self-esteem model. Adapted from (Sonstroem, 1989)

The Sonstroem model brings into focus a number of important aspects of the self that help explain sport's effect on self-esteem. Namely that exercise behavior is associated with increases in global self-esteem through the effect of self-efficacy, and its subsequent influence on physical competence and physical acceptance. Moreover (Levy and Ebbeck, 2005) show that for women, physical acceptance plays a particularly important role in the physical self-perception and self-esteem relationship. Their research shows that physical acceptance has a far stronger influence on global self-esteem than does physical competence. This is no surprise. Across many studies using the Physical Self Perception Profile (PSPP) developed by Fox and Corbin (1989) the concept of body attractiveness dominates physical self-worth (Fox, 1997). It also appears to play an influencing role in sports with such self-motives as self-presentation (Leary, 1992). However to simply assert that high levels of exercise provides high levels of benefit for females sports participants with low self-esteem is over-simplistic.

(Tiggemann and Williamson, 2000) have shown that sport and exercise have different effects on self-esteem and body satisfaction levels not only between genders but also between age groups within the same gender. In their research older women were able to achieve raised self-esteem and body satisfaction through weight loss and improved body perceptions. However the young female respondents exhibited a negative relationship between the amounts of exercise undertaken and their body satisfaction and self-esteem. It was posited by Tiggemann and Williamson that unrealistic pressures are being heaped on young women to achieve body images that are simply unattainable!

Finally to complete the literature review a brief discussion on motivation. There are many theories relating to motivation in sport. The main contenders being attribution theory, self-efficacy, goal attainment and self-determination.

## **2.6 The role of self-esteem within sports motivation**

Although the focus of this research remains firmly focused on the role of self-motives and self-esteem within the context of identity, any research involving sport should include a discussion on sport motivation. Outside of sport, motivation has a somewhat diffuse meaning applied across a number of contexts. Within sport however, motivation has a more concrete and specific meaning defined by (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2005) as “an internal state that activates, energises, or directs action or behavior.

Self-efficacy represents an important social-cognitive theory of motivation (Bandura, 1982) that explains an individual's belief in their ability to complete a task under certain conditions. Self-efficacy influences self-regulation, enables the individual to have a greater influence over their environment, encourages persistence under conditions of adversity, facilitates problem solving and enhances the degree of satisfaction participants gain from their endeavours. The links between performance and self-efficacy have unsurprisingly been shown to be strong (Mcauley and Blissmer, 2002).

Whereas self-efficacy describes the self-belief that an individual can achieve a specified goal under certain conditions, self-determination theory explains the mechanism by which individuals can internalise initially externally contingent goals to create an internal locus of control and achieving a desirable self-regulatory outcome. Major academics in this field (Deci and Ryan, 2000) have also shown how real or imagined rewards can lower intrinsic motivation instead creating a set of external performance contingencies, which ultimately undermine long-term commitment and performance levels. For many, self-determination is also the link between self-esteem and behavior. (Fox, 1997), explains how the internalisation of fitness goals can create a sense of positive self-evaluation through the mastery of self-regulatory behavior regarding exercise activity, fitness achievement and weight management. In this case competence does not feature as a motivational element. Self-esteem protection in this example is achieved through gaining a new source of self-affirmation while self-esteem enhancement is facilitated through feeling good about oneself in a new and specific regulatory domain.

One further important facet of motivation that has implications for self-esteem is that of 'motivation orientation'. Research within the educational context by (Ames, 1992) has shown that individuals have a clear dispositional goal orientation from an early age. These can be summarised as:

Mastery orientation:    Enjoyment/satisfaction  
                                 Attribute success to effort  
                                 Intrinsic motivation  
                                 Personal competence important  
                                 Higher levels of Self-efficacy

Ego orientation:        Often suffer a negative outcome  
                                 Display maladaptive behaviours  
                                 Exhibit anxiety and stress  
                                 Attribute success to ability

(Duda, 1989) was also able to demonstrate the consequences of mastery vs. ego orientation within the high school sports context. He showed how teaching that placed emphasis on skill mastery and personal improvement (task orientation) led to results that showed how sport can enhance self-esteem and ensure optimum effort and good sportsmanship. Meanwhile sports leadership that allowed or encouraged ego orientation simply focused on an individual athlete's self-esteem and social status with negative impact on other areas of their sporting behavior and performance.

## **2.7 Summary**

This significant section containing the literature review has provided evidence for the role of the self-concept in an individual's life, and explained its structure and hierarchical nature. The role of self-esteem has also been reviewed explaining its motivational role in driving behavior and influencing cognition. Self-motives were then discussed and explored as to their relationship to self-esteem protection and enhancement. A second section within the review focused on the self-concept structures relevant to sport including the physical self and body-attractiveness. Finally the key aspects of motivation and its potential influence on self-esteem were reviewed.

## **Chapter 3. Research questions**

### **3.1 Overview**

As seen in the literature review, the role of the self-concept, and its relationship with self-esteem are well covered within academic research. As is the motivational mechanisms behind sport and exercise and its positive impact on self-esteem, and the physical self. However much of the research focuses on the effect of participation on the ultimate self-esteem levels of professional and collegiate athletes. What remains far less well researched are the specific self-motives involved in the journey to esteem enhancement within non-elite sport. Here participation is optional, and high levels of motivation are required to meet sometimes challenging self-defined goals and levels of involvement.

Enthusiast/competitive running is such a sport. It has a large and growing following and requires a great deal of self-motivation for training and performance goal achievement. Adult female running groups are common phenomena within large cities and their members demonstrate extraordinary levels of commitment to train all year, in all weathers and despite having to juggle a large number of obligations in order to attend training and compete. This research looks to uncover the motivations for such commitment. What is driving the dedication? What are the motives? How are the individuals rewarded? What are the individual variations seen within the sample? Finally does their purchase of and relationship with running brands in any way reflect this in any way?

### **3.2 Research question**

*To explore the ways in which running provides a platform for adult female running enthusiasts to achieve their self-identity goals.*

### **3.3 Research objectives**

- 1. To identify the key self-processes observed in connection with running*
- 2. To understand how adult female runners harness these self-processes in pursuit of their self-identity goals.*
- 3. To explore how these self-processes are related to the self-esteem goals of the individuals.*



4. *To provide insight as to how running brands might feature as facilitators for the self-motives and esteem goals of the runners.*

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter has provided a background to the development of the research question and the key research objectives that have been used to guide the research work. The following chapter now reviews the research thinking and methodology that has been devised to uncover the answers to the research question and deliver insight for future work and research in this and related areas.

## **Chapter 4. Research methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The open and perceptual nature of the research questions, naturally led to the adoption of an exploratory approach to the research. Individual semi-structured depth interviews were used to elicit the required data and insight. An important guiding principle throughout was to encourage the respondents to explore their own feelings and comment reflexively on their behavior. By ensuring a careful and sensitive probing strategy normally hidden feelings and emotions were allowed to rise to the surface for exploration and discussions as to their meaning.

### **4.2 Research philosophy**

Whilst methodological choice could have driven the direction of this research project, it was understood early on that methodological process should flow from philosophical stance and not visa versa (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Sport has always represented an immensely symbolic human endeavor. We are socialised to its meaning virtually from childhood with acquired knowledge and experiences becoming deeply imbued with ideological, psychological, sociological, cultural and political meaning (Bouchet et al., 2013). By avoiding the more rigid positivist approach of trying to predict outcomes from meaning and through the adoption of an interpretivist perspective it was possible to develop an understanding of the world as seen by the respondents.

This was important from an ontological perspective as the reality under scrutiny was socially developed by the runners themselves and through their social interactions within their communities (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Prediction would have been meaningless as each individual had created his or her own socially constructed world with their specific responses reflecting many perceived realities that could not have been known beforehand (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Blumer (1969), describes the understanding gained during interpretivist research as “feeling ones way inside the experience of the actor”. The highly personal and sensitive nature of the esteem discussions during the qualitative research interviews required this ‘softly softly’ form of enquiry.

Interpretivist evaluation criteria provided other important guidelines to ensure the quality of respondent insight. Blumer (1969) in his work also highlighted the importance of the natural setting so that respondents feel at ease. The holding of the depth interviews in the respondent's own home and at the time of their suiting was intentional. It provided a relaxed environment conducive to the interpretivist goals of this research.

The quality of interpretivist research has also been explored by Geertz (1973), who describes the importance of achieving "thick descriptions" of phenomenon, which are detailed and inclusive of context and historical aspects. The scope of enquiry within this research included the covering of childhood sporting experiences, inter-personal relationships both inside and outside of sport as well as achievement histories. This ensured that observations and insights were ground in a more detailed phenomenological and symbolic interactionism context.

Finally as moderator, the author of this dissertation was aware of his own history of high intensity running, its effect on his own self-concept and the injuries brought about by over-training. Heron (1996) draws attention to the axiological implications of the moderator and his or her need to be cognisant of its influence through value judgements during the research. This was an important consideration that remained uppermost in the mind of the author throughout the research interview and analysis process.

### **4.3 Research approach**

This research project utilised an inductive approach. Thomas, (2006) describes induction as firstly condensing raw textual data into a brief summary, then establishing clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings, finally developing a framework of the underlying structure of experiences that are evident in the raw data. This was the intention here. To achieve this we needed to employ ways of getting to the heart of what was going on, how the respondents truly felt and the attitudes and beliefs driving their behaviour and self-perceptions. The context of their lives was vitally important as it provided rich insights into their social interactions and their meaning to the running participants (Saunders et al., 2012).

## 4.4 Research Strategy

### *Research design strategy*

The research design chosen was that of mono-method semi-structured qualitative depth interviews. A total of 15 interviews were carried out each lasting between 1.5- 2 hours in length. This gave sufficient time for quality discussions across all key areas of exploration and for the respondents to feel relaxed, unhurried and able to elaborate freely where necessary. The interviews were carried out in the respondent's homes with all interviews recorded, and later fully transcribed.

Creswell, J. W. (2012) describes in his book a short list of characteristics of a “good qualitative study”. A particularly important issue highlighted was that of a “rigorous approach to data collection, analysis and report writing. Cresswell describes the need for multiple levels of data analysis. This was echoed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their attempt at providing a framework for the trustworthiness of qualitative research under the guises of credibility transferability dependability and confirmability. For this research two aspects were seen as particularly important: Firstly ‘credibility’ which “depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher” (Patton, 1990). Secondly ‘transferability’ to other situations through the provision of sufficient information enabling the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to a new situation (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Both credibility and transferability were carefully considered during the development of this research. A process of rigorous data collection and analysis was designed into the research with each interview fully transcribed and formatted for coding as shown below in figure 5.

KE:	Oh yeah, that really, that was amazing. The amount of various emotions that you go through, running something like that. I think that really highlighted to me again, just how much running affects your mind or your mind affects running as well. Just the mental fatigue of going through that was- gave me a whole new level of appreciation for running and runners.	
INT:	Tell me about it, what do you mean?	
KE:	I just think in terms of the amount of control and discipline that you have to have over yourself. The amount of times you want to stop, when you're doing that, that just something keeps you going. Talking to yourself in your head and emotionally, from feeling on top of the word, then I can even remember crying towards the end of it. It parts I was in pain, there was one point we were running through the tunnel, actually where Lady Di- where they had the car crash there. It was so dark in there and these guys just started cheering and it really upset me for some reason, and I felt like it lost my concentration on what I was doing. But seeing the finish line and still managing a bit of a sprint finish at the end, thinking that you're completely spent, but finding something from somewhere to get you over the finish.	

Figure 5. Example transcript prepared for coding

Another driving consideration in the research design was that the research should provide relevant sources of insight and learning for brand marketing practitioners. (Yip, 2011) writing in the Financial Times bemoans the ‘relevance gap’ between academia and practitioners explaining that much academic work is generally not what managers can use, meanwhile managers look for over-simplistic solutions. This research is looking to avoid a similar trap.

### *Sampling strategy*

The sampling objectives of this research, was to find respondents that would be able to provide a rich source of insight regarding the world of the enthusiast runner and their communities. Respondents would have to be able to articulate the sometimes complex and often privately held attitudes beliefs and emotions that related to their running motivations and the self-motives that link to their self-esteem. Purposive sampling was employed using known contacts within the running world that were able to find and engage with potential respondents for the study. It was important that the respondents met a number of criteria. These criteria are listed below

#### DEMOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. The runners should engage in running at least 3 times per week
2. The runners should consider running an important personal sporting activity
3. The runners would be female age between 30-50

#### PSYCHOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. The runners should be articulate
2. The runners should feel comfortable expressing emotions, attitudes and beliefs

Employing the above recruitment criteria helped ensure a high quality of discussion and encourage the uncovering of rich insights. It also provided motivated respondents who were willing to talk about their goals, emotions and frustrations as well as their inter-personal experiences and consumption behaviours. No payment was required for the respondent’s participation.

How effective has our sampling strategy been? (Miles and Huberman, 1994) suggest sampling strategies can be evaluated in terms of six different attributes. Relevance, potential richness of data generation, generalisability, believability, ethics and feasibility. It is believed that these criteria have been met satisfactorily.

### *Interview structure*

A pilot interview was carried out initially to test the discussion guide and allow for refinements to ensure timings and flow worked according to requirements. This allowed important amendments to the discussion guide and ensured that the interview timings did not over-run without compromising the quality of the data collected.

The interview structure was intended to gradually relax respondents into the discussion areas working steadily towards the richer insight areas of self-identity, self-esteem and the self-motives. This worked well and respondents having been fully reassured regarding anonymity appeared relaxed about sharing deep seated identity issues, self-related esteem issues and how running was used in achieving personal goals in many aspects of their lives. A brief overview of the discussion areas is shown below in table 1.

Section	Theme	Topics/objectives
<b>PART 1: Life Context</b>		
1	Scene setting	To relax the respondent and allow them to feel trusting of the setting, explain the research focus and the importance of authenticity in their answers
2	Growing up with sport	Introduction to sport, importance in early life, role in friendship groups, motivations for participation.
3	Sport and its role within respondents lifestyle	Work life balance, relationships, life goals, achievements, and challenges. Role of leisure, exercise, sport and health.
<b>PART 2: Running Profile</b>		
1	Current running program and training	To understand the scope of running involvement and social interactions
2	Role of running plays within their lifestyle	Level of running's importance. Contingencies for involvement. Commitment and emotional connection with running
3	Running brand consumption.	Importance of brands, drivers of brand choice, brand symbolism and brand image elaboration
<b>Part 3: Running and self-identity</b>		
1	Running and identity	Understanding how running has become part of how they respondents perceive themselves and are viewed by others.
2	Running and self-esteem	Running's perceived influence on trait and state levels of esteem
3	Running and self-motives	The self-motives used by runners to protect and enhance their self-esteem
4	Running brand's potential for symbolic consumption	The role running brands as a tool for achieving identity and esteem goals.

*Table 1: Interview structure outline*

## ***Research Ethics***

Before agreeing to take part, all respondents we provided with a respondent information sheet that provided an overview of the Nature of the Research, the structure and timings of the research interview and their rights as a respondent. It also provided a reassurance regarding the anonymity of their participation. Respondents were also given and asked to sign a consent form covering the interview and their permission for recording the discussions.

(Saunders et al., 2012) provide an excellent over-view of the stages of research and the specific ethical issues that arise at each stage. The following represents the considerations that were drawn up using this framework for each stage of the research.

### **Key ethics issues surrounding current research project**

<i>Clarifying the research topic:</i>	Recognising the importance of objectivity. Risk assessment of potential for psychological harm
<i>Designing the research and access:</i>	Ensuring informed consent. Reassurance over privacy rights
<i>Data collection:</i>	Lack of coercion by moderator. Right to informed consent Rights to privacy. Sensitive handling of emotional topics. Right to withdraw during interview. Avoidance of any form of emotional harm
<i>Data processing and storage:</i>	Confidentiality and anonymity. Lack of coercion by moderator. Right to informed consent. Rights to privacy. Sensitive handling of emotional topics. Right to withdraw during interview. Avoidance of any form of emotional harm
<i>Data analysis:</i>	Maintenance of objectivity. Confidentiality. Avoidance of harm

## **4.5 Data Analysis**

(Guest, Macqueen and Namey, 2011), describe thematic analysis as “a bit of everything, grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism and phenomenology”. Their view that it can be both inductive and rigorous makes it an ideal candidate for this research project. On the one hand thematic analysis encourages an openness to new concepts and connections that encourages the development of new insight. On the other hand the rigor of the analytical process helps ensure validity.

Another factor in choosing thematic analysis is its breadth and scope. It not only encompasses human experience, but also social and cultural phenomena. This is important as running participants display all three aspects intertwined. It is also recognised that this thematic analysis is focused on exploration rather than explanation. We are not observing and codifying a phenomenon but seeking to understand and draw connections between context, interactions and behaviour within the world of the runners.

The first challenge of the analysis-planning phase was to establish what constitutes a legitimate theme. Saldaña (2012) defines a theme as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about”. Strauss and Corbin, (1990) describe themes as “concepts”. In their paper on techniques to identify themes, Ryan and Bernard (2003) go further and provide watch-outs to identify instances of potential themes. These include the processing techniques of repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data and theory related material.

Drawing inspiration from the techniques of Ryan and Bernard (2003), a three-stage process was undertaken to develop a number of valid and meaningful themes from the data. Firstly the actual discovery of sub-themes, secondly the reduction into a smaller number of more fundamental themes, and thirdly linking these back to theoretical models of cognition and behaviour to draw meaningful insight.

Although initial intentions included the use of analysis software it soon became apparent that more manual paper-based techniques would allow a more intimate relationship with the data and ultimately assist with the visualisation of and aggregation of sub-themes into broader more conceptual themes. The process involved isolating the key sub-sub themes or codes by highlighting the related text printouts of respondent transcripts. These were then printed and cut out analysed and sorted into broader sub-themes. Finally by re-reading the transcripts and referring back to the theories and research from the literature review, connections and meaning came into focus allowing the building of over-arching themes and to hypothesise their relationship to existing theory.

An example of one of the early stage word document showing respondent quotes collated within a sub-theme is shown below in figure 3.



### **Running's role in body self-schema**

- C1: *So I probably wouldn't necessarily put on that much weight (if I stopped running) but when I kind of think. Yeah my quads are pretty strong my gluts are strong so I think I'd probably just be a bit more flabby.*
- C1: *I suppose I enjoy the compliments from people saying gosh you look really good ... and I know that they mean physique wise and so yeah I feel proud*
- KE: *I stuck with it and managed to lose a lot of the weight*
- KE: *I was also keen to make sure I was going to fit in my wedding dress.*
- JO: *I wouldn't like to put on the weight. Yes, it is an attraction thing.*

*Figure 6: Creation of sub-themes from respondent data*

## **4.6 Research Limitations**

Whilst qualitative market research is well recognized for the depth, richness and the holistic scope of its processes, qualitative research is also known for its shortcomings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) attempt to provide solutions to match the more positivist standards achieved through quantitative methods but these are not always possible. Firstly the sampling in this case being purposive is likely to introduce a number of unaccounted variables. How objective was the researcher in choosing the individuals? Were the respondents chosen clustered around one attribute such as a demographic or psychographic variable that could have biased the data? Whilst every effort was made to avoid this it cannot be ruled out. The data collection whilst accurately transcribed was subjected to thematic analysis. As an analysis technique this relies more heavily on interpretation than other more mechanical coding techniques. Should the author have been biased, ill informed, or unscrupulous in the analysis the discussions and conclusions could be flawed. In defense the level of background reading, dedication to objectivity and personal experience within the research and marketing environment of the author should minimise the degree to which this bias was allowed to take place. Finally as with all qualitative work, the skills required to tease out and probe the true feelings of the respondents, allow silences to enable reflection during the discussion and to recognise when a different approach is required cannot be taken for granted. The author is not a professional researcher with 100's of hour's moderation under his belt. Despite reading numerous books on the subject the research results are dependent on the author's interview moderation abilities.

#### **4.7 Summary**

The approach to the design and development of the research phase of the project has been outlined in this chapter. It has covered the choice of research philosophy, approach and strategy, including the interview design, sampling approach and ethics considerations. In addition the intended methodology for data analysis has been reviewed, as well as the overall limitations for this research. The next chapter will detail the research results, which have explored the self-identity goals that motivate the behavior of the chosen adult female running enthusiasts.

## **Chapter 5. Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The central role, played by trait and state self-esteem and the contingencies on which individuals base their self-worth were a recurring theme throughout this research. There were clear differences between the state self-esteem of respondents which appeared to guide overall behaviour, state self-esteem differences which exerted more specific situational influence and contingencies of self-worth which appeared to influence the source and rational for motivations. Respondents were able to articulate many of these influences and their consequent effect on behavior and attitudes to participation. The nine themes reflect the extrapolation of these and give insight as to the role played by running in facilitating the self-motive ambitions of the runners.

### **5.2 Overview**

Eight key themes were seen within the data and used as a framework in which to present the research results. These themes represent the most significant output from the research, based on three criteria. Firstly the relevance to the research questions, secondly the importance of the themes in influencing the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the runners and thirdly their frequency of occurrence within the dataset. The decision to include a quantitative representation of the data may seem a little surprising. However as Guest (2012) suggests “consider the ambiguity that may result from not providing some quantification of the qualitative data”. In this case it provides a reflection of the relative importance of each theme and was included. Table 2 below provides an overview of the eight themes that were extrapolated from the data, with figure 7 showing their frequencies graphically within the dataset.

Theme	Description
IDENTITY ASSOCIATIONS WITH RUNNING CAN START IN CHILDHOOD.	Parental influence and pressure plays a significant role in forming the associations between individuals and sport.
RUNNING AS A FACILITATOR OF SELF KNOWLEDGE & SELF CATEGORISATION	Running provides building blocks for self-knowledge and self-categorisation and self-improvement
RUNNING AS A FACILITATOR OF SOCIAL CONNECTION	Running provides social expansion opportunities through its facilitation of social connections
RUNNING PROVIDES DISTINCT PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS	Running provides an escape from anxiety social pressures & esteem damage. It is a powerful source of self-affirmation.
RUNNING POSITIVELY IMPACTS SELF-ESTEEM	By facilitating goal achievement, boosting self-efficacy and as a pillar of self-worth, running can protect self-esteem
RUNNING POSITIVELY IMPACTS BODY SELF-SCHEMA	Through its direct facilitation of weight loss and by shifting perceptions of the body self-schema away from beauty.
REASSURANCE AND PERSONAL EXPERTISE DRIVE SHOE CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR	Fear of injury, discomfort and performance drive shoe brand purchase to channels where expert advice is available
RATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL NEEDS DRIVE RUNNING APPAREL PURCHASE	Fit, comfort and technical benefits drive purchase at the expense of fashion and brand status

Table 2: Core theme overview and description

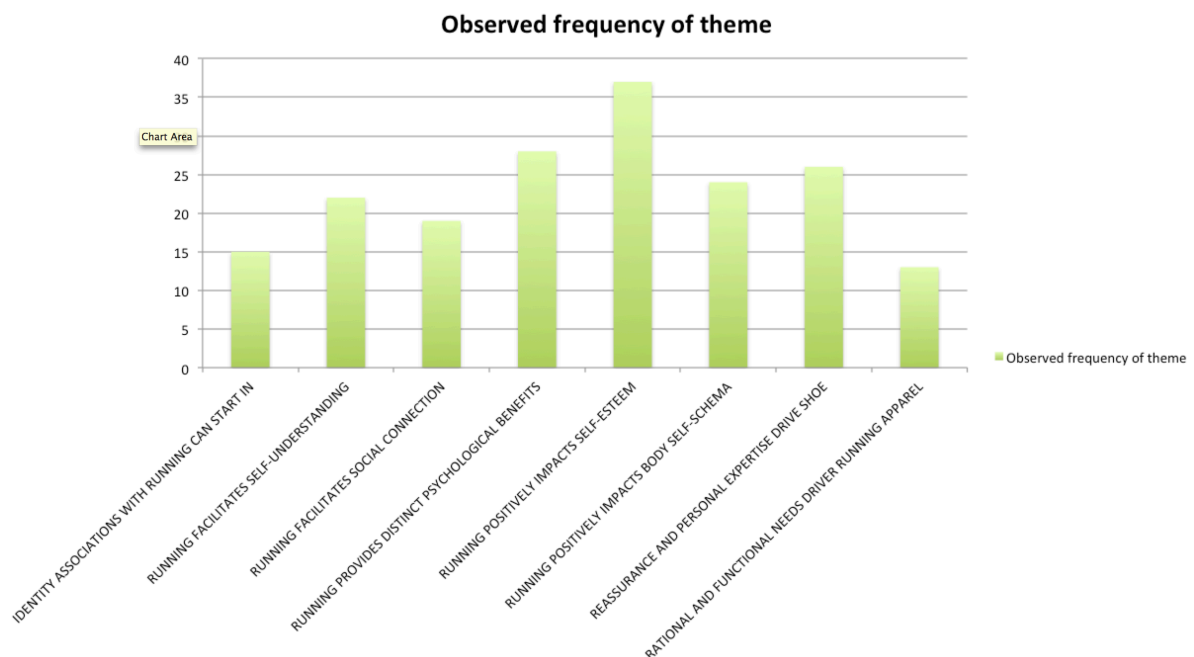


Figure 7: Observed frequency of themes

### 5.3 Observed Themes

#### Theme 1: Identity associations with running often start in childhood

Sports activities through mandatory inclusion in the school physical education curriculum was a formative time for many respondents with regards their involvement in sports and exercise. In some cases respondents recognised an early talent for running and through identification with peers and teachers internalised this self-efficacy into a feature of their identity.

*Judith (age 47): I did the running race, the sprinting race, the sack race, and I won all of them. So after that ... I realized that I was a runner, I suppose ... that was part of who I was, I suppose. I just got so used to doing this. It was part of my identity.*

Sporting performance at school could also be heavily influenced through the role of the parents. In some cases this was positive with parents previous sporting successes seen as motivating to the respondents during their school years.

*Interviewer: Did your parents have any influence on your sport participation?*

*Michelle (Age 37): Pretty much my mother, I think, the running side very much. They both absolutely love sport. My mother was particularly sporty. She grew up in Sri Lanka so croquet was the big thing there, but my mother was also a runner. She ran for the Sri Lankan team. She was a sprinter. She also played hockey and my father was a swimmer and loved sport.*

In some cases parental involvement was more pro-active with the parents becoming directly involved in coaching the respondents. This could become a source of encouragement. However it could also turn into a source of contingency development of the respondent's self-worth when pressure was excessive and reflected issues stemming from the parent themselves. Respondents saw this in hindsight as a double-edged sword.

*Kirsty (age 36): Yeah I would say from an early age, my dad particularly very sporty. Always had been and was very encouraging.*

*Judith (age 47): My mom got us into it, that she put a lot of pressure: I have a sister as well who used to run. She used to put so much pressure on the two of us.*

School sport also facilitated social group belonging through school team involvement. This often had a positive effect on the respondent allowing them to form friendship bonds and in other cases protecting fragile self-esteem constructs and avoidance of bullying.

*Kirsty (age 36) Luckily there was some of the popular girls, who were also on the team, and I did think that set me aside from any bullying or anything like that at school.*

## **Theme 2: Running as a facilitator of self-knowledge and self-categorisation**

With many of the respondents training and competing up to 6 days a week, running had become a substantial part of their lives and a key source of personal reference. Across the respondent group, the sense of a coherent multi-dimensional identity was variable. In some running played a substantive but not critical aspect of their self-concept. Competitive running success was not a contingent for self-worth with self-knowledge being acquired elsewhere.

*Emma (age 49): I think running for me it's one part of my life and its important but I know why I do it and its not about being competitive.*

For others running acted as a training ground for coping with life's adversities and helping respondents understand their limits and pain barriers.

*Anne (age 36): I can figure out ways to, how I deal with these things (adversity) in running so that I can deal with them in other areas of my life.*

*Sarah (age 47): I suppose its taught me that I don't always push myself as hard as a could.*

Many respondents made specific reference to re-connecting with their true self through running. It was as if running provided a mirror for them to study their identity and learn how to cope with these in the wider world. Sometimes they surprise themselves gaining a sense of self-efficacy that spread to their wider lifestyle outside of sport

*Kirat (age 47): Its taught me I'm incredibly strong, it's taught me about myself I'm an incredibly controlled person, I'm not spontaneous, I'm controlled I don't do spontaneity.*

*Nuala (age 37): I would have done that (gone outside my comfort zone) if I hadn't been running and known that I could push myself.*

For others a lack of connection and belonging within their wider lives left their self-esteem vulnerable. For these respondents group belonging provided an important esteem lifeline enabling the individuals to associate themselves with the group culture and identity. This in turn provided a source of self-affirmation to dampen down moments of self-doubt and when their self-esteem was under threat.

*Emma (age 49): I see myself as the next group of runners who take it more seriously and think of themselves as runners rather than joggers and who run two or three times a week.*

*Anne (age 36): It's nice to be able to categorise myself as a runner or this and that because as you said before, I think I struggled with my place in the world.*

### **Theme 3: Running as a facilitator of social connection**

As life has become more pressured for the respondents with increasing demands on their time, social groupings formed when younger often dissipated. With many of them also living in different cities to where they grew up, the feelings of disconnectedness lack of meaningful social groups and loneliness were viewed as barriers to happiness and fulfilment. Many found that running provided a much-needed platform to re-connect.

*Kirstie (age 36) Since having the children and your whole social life kind of disappears. It's given me (running) a new circle of friends.*

*Michelle (age 36) I just felt like I belonged and I think maybe for girls especially ... we call it cliques.*

Many respondents also saw running as offering a platform for self-expansion particularly in the area of friendship and social connection. Running was seen as a great social leveller representing a catalyst for reaching across the socio-cultural divide and forming the basis for friendship groups around running clubs with a more diverse social group.

*Luisa (age 43): Yeah, and I would say definitely its an opportunity you can also meet people and make connections that otherwise you wouldn't make.*

*Claudia (age 48): It cuts across the social divide as well (people in the groups) that's nice.*

For some social connection to running groups allows them to experience a strong sense of kinship they felt missing in other aspects of their lives. Those without families felt caught in a treadmill of '24/7' work life with running the only meaningful source of personal meaning, friendship and group belongingness.

*Nuala (age 37): One woman who really struggled for the last couple of miles we helped by staying together and really encouraging her through it. Actually we all finished together in a respectable time with a really great sense of achievement.*

#### **Theme 4: Running provides distinct psychological benefits**

With many of the respondents running, competing and training most days of the week, it appeared that there are other drivers of behaviour at play beyond that of performance improvement and fitness maintenance. Many respondents talked of the anxiety and mood drop associated with running injury and the enforced rest and recovery. Although the immediate endorphin rush from running is well known and understood, respondents reported a longer-term mental health uplift that allowed them to cope with the challenges in their daily life, face up to their demons and enjoy a more calmer and balanced existence.

*Michelle (age 37) Running gave me something which I actually overcame my own obsession with my own demons.*

*Anne (age 36): I have a lot of anxiety about not being comfortable in my own skin, if you know that term. Being afraid of not being pretty enough good enough ... the other side of my life is running which made me feel good and I didn't compare myself to anyone else.*

The range of psychological benefits appeared most often reported with those respondents of lower trait self-esteem for whom running was a psychological escape valve. Others described how running was a key benefit when state self-esteem damage disrupted their psychological well being.

*Emma (Age 49): Also it helped mentally (the running) so if I had some relationship issue or something stressful at work.*



### **Theme 5: Running positively impacts self-esteem**

Running was universally recognised across all of the respondents as a powerful tool for helping to maintain, protect, manage and grow their levels of self-esteem. For some it was running's ability to provide a platform for goal setting and achievement monitoring that unlocked the route to esteem growth.

*Jackie (age 42) There was something about wanting recognition for being good at something such as winning races and being picked.*

For others it was the self-esteem boost that comes with proof of achievement and improvement.

*Luisa (age 43) I was more interested in my personal best. I always wanted to improve my own personal best*

*Sarah (age 44) I guess because I wanted to improve. I want to see myself get faster with my Garmin.*

For respondents who felt more vulnerable in life and talked of having lower self-esteem running provided a protective barrier against esteem damage allowing the respondents an emotional shelter against the negative events in their work and personal lives. This esteem protection could take a number of forms including; running acting as a contingency of their self-worth; self-monitoring of their target achievement behaviour to improve self-efficacy perceptions; social comparisons with weaker runners to elevate their perceptions of relative running skill mastery.

*Kirat (age 47): Yeah because I feel insecure in certain aspects of my life and I feel very vulnerable whereas I don't feel that in running even if I am last. Yeah running is my safety net.*

*Kirstie (age 36) I always feel that when it comes to running, deep down I know I'm better than the average person, at that I almost feel that it's something I cannot be criticised on.*

For those respondents with a more robust self-esteem running had a more functional role in their lives. While goal achievement was recognised as a positive feature of life and self-improvement, lack of it did not impact their sense of wellbeing or feelings of self-worth.

*Emma (age 48) I think because I've always set myself goals, I don't think doing the marathon particularly made a difference to my, say, confidence to be able to achieve things*

## **Theme 6: Running positively impacts body self-schema**

Respondents were clear that a relationship existed between food intake, running frequency and their consequent weight. Most of the respondents believed they had migrated from perceiving their bodies as an object of potential sexual attractiveness to being proud of their toned and slight frames as a result of constant running and training.

*Kirat (age 47): For a woman and a man I think there is nothing sexier than looking toned, looking healthy, looking athletic and having that fitness.*

*Sarah (aged 44): I feel far more focussed on whether my body is working properly than how I look.*

Furthermore weight loss and low weight maintenance was a key driver for running in the first place, with respondents proud of their weight reductions attributed to their training regimes. Some worried that running cessation prompted by injury would precipitate a weight gain they would subsequently have to work hard again to lose.

*Sarah (age 44): Recently I twisted by ankle. It was only for a few weeks, but I wasn't able to run. I noticed in that time, I'd put on a few pounds.*

## **Theme 7: Reassurance and personal expertise drive shoe consumption behaviour**

Despite high levels of marketing expenditure, respondents appeared immune to the messages, positioning, heritage and functional benefit claims of the running shoe brands. Respondents were unable to elaborate beyond brand name recognition and had no knowledge of specific ranges or sport celebrity endorsement connections.

*Interviewer: What do you know about your running shoe brand manufacturer Asics?*

*Sarah (age 44): I don't really think of them as brands. I think about whether it's a comfortable shoe*

*Jo (age 37): I have no idea. The main thing for me is definitely if it's the right shoe for my feet and my running style*

Moreover, despite the products centrality to the respondents running participation involvement seems low with little reported symbolic consumption of shoe brands.

*Interviewer: How important or relevant to you is it that people see you wearing a professional brand of running shoe?*

*Jo (age 37): Irrelevant*

Respondents believed channel choice was an important consideration in running shoe purchase. Price and convenience were considered secondary drivers in comparison to the benefits of access to professional guidance from knowledgeable sales assistants that were themselves experienced runners.

*Claudia (age 48): I will seek advice in 'Runners Need' because they are all knowledgeable*

*Sarah (age 44): I buy them in a local specialist running store. It's important to me even though I could get them cheaper online.*

Furthermore injury avoidance was consistently voiced as the key consumer need driving channel choice. Respondents were clear that the consequences of running injury outweighed other purchase drivers encouraging them to repeat purchase running shoe models that had previously helped respondents to remain injury free.

*Jo (age 37): I always buy the same shoes because when I turned my ankle I tended to use those running shoes that I know were tested*

#### **Theme 8: Rational and functional needs drive running apparel purchase**

Despite the fashion and lifestyle associations promoted by the leading running apparel brands running participants displayed little interest in styling, appearance and symbolic brand associations. Running apparel was chosen on the basis of fit, comfort and effectiveness of 'wicking' technology. Apparel unlike running shoes was not considered a critical purchase decision with brand loyalty at a minimal and brand image messaging being largely ignored.

Respondents simply did not appear motivated to seek external image enhancement from their peers based on clothing brand choice or appearance. Furthermore this did not vary significantly across the group despite observed variations in self-esteem levels.

*Nuala (age 37): I've never felt that I need to build my own identity by adopting someone's marketing strategy*

*Claudia (age 48): The shoes are somehow an investment; the rest of it is comfort.*

## Chapter 6. Discussion

The central aim of this paper was to determine the ways in which running provided a platform for adult female runners to achieve their self-identity goals. Whilst self-esteem is recognised as being implicated as a driver for sports participation, its grip over many of the respondents in this research project was intense. For some life appeared hard as they struggled with self-esteem and self-worth contingency issues. Perhaps unsurprising when one views self-esteem damage through the lens of sociometer theory as an intentionally painful evolutionary tool (Leary, *et al.*, 1995). The central theme emerging from our enthusiast runner cohort was also one of struggle. A struggle to achieve career success; a struggle to create a social network when forced to move; a struggle for achievement recognition; or a struggle to come to terms with a body image they believed as less than ideal. For many these beliefs and perceptions had a detrimental effect on their self-esteem. The result a drive or motivation to seek ways in which they could re-set their individual self-esteem through achievement, recognition and in-group status belonging.

However in doing so many had created a series of contingencies on which their self-esteem became based (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001) and so the reliance and in some cases addition to running had set in. For many of the female respondents running was a lifeline to friendship and social groups that were unattainable through other routes. Baumeister & Leary (1995) describes these “interpersonal bonds” that we are motivated so highly to achieve as a “fundamental human motive”. Being the self-esteem motives of the respondents were so strong however, one must ask if the sampling of highly committed runners has in fact acted as a positive screener for individuals who have in some way suffered self-esteem loss or have endured a lifelong struggle with low trait self-esteem.

In addition several of the runners reported a high level of anxiety and had experienced various bouts of poor psychological health. Chamberlain & Haaga (2001) describes the evidence linking contingent self-worth constructs and poor mental health and recommends finding strategies for unconditional self-acceptance. Running for some provided a shelter with respondents describing the “untouchable” mental space enabled by their running. The challenge was for the respondents to not allow it to become a contingent in itself.

Levy & Ebbeck (2005) describe the concept and importance of physical self-acceptance in contributing to self-esteem levels. Body image not surprisingly also featured highly in the list of self-motives satisfied by running for the respondents. Running provided a platform for the positive change to their physical-self in several ways. Firstly running was reported to have contributed substantially to weight loss. Most of the respondents reported significant reductions in weight, which they believed, helped make them more attractive, youthful and sporty in appearance. Also and perhaps more fundamental running appears to have shifted their self-focus on body image from attractiveness to performance. For many this provided a freedom from anxiety over their sexual attractiveness and boosted their self-confidence.

Sedikides (1993) demonstrated the importance of self-verification in providing individuals with a coherent sense of their identity. Through the runner's measurement of training times and confirmation of competition timings, respondents were able to make attributions for the reasons behind their success or failure to achieve their goals. Statements such as 'running through the pain barrier' and 'achieving a personal best despite carrying an injury' creates a narrative for the respondents from which they could draw personal strength. It allowed them to elaborate their self-schemas to include positive attributes such as not being a quitter or being highly self-motivated under adversity. For those with low self-esteem running had become a measurable and credible source of self-belief. The almost addictive regimes observed could be viewed as the dangers of allowing a single activity to become a major source of contingent self-worth.

Much has been written about the mechanisms behind motivation and the positive role of self-determination in achieving mastery and satisfaction of particular importance was the work of Deci & Ryan (2000). In the research for this paper the respondents clearly reported running for themselves not others and were motivated by mastery rather than an improved external perceived image. It was as if running represented a purer form of human endeavour and achievement, was highly personal and worthy pursuit and was untainted by commercial gain and vanity.

Running appeared also to provide esteem shelter to the respondents in another way. Rather than simply a facilitator of esteem gain it was also a shelter for moments when respondent's self-esteem felt under threat. Relationship issues, redundancy, loss of friendship groups were all reported as examples of perceived esteem damage. In these cases many respondents used running as a potent source for self-affirmation, reminding themselves of their achievements, friendship groups and moments of pride to counter the painful feelings of the esteem damage. In some cases this worked completely in other cases it softened the blow.

Finally with regards the respondent's relationship with running brands and their consumption behaviour. It appears that the key driver for running shoe brand choice is injury avoidance. This influenced both model selection and channel choice with professional recommendation being sought and price premiums accepted in order to ensure the right model for their running style and gait. Running shoe brand owners should focus their marketing on enlisting brand loyalty at the B2B channel level, providing sales assistants within specialist stores high levels of training and support in order to recommend their brand to prospective customers. Image branding, celebrity endorsement and blanket awareness campaigns, appears wasted on this enthusiast group.

Running apparel brand owners face a more uphill battle. Brand choice is considered unimportant with channel choice driven by convenience and price. Comfort and fit drive the individual SKU choice with attention paid to comfort and fit and the effectiveness of wicking technology to keep the runners dry. Some brand awareness exists however this has only marginal influence on apparel choice and only justifies a small price premium. It is likely from the author's previous experience in the sector that sales are more likely from the fashion conscious youth market and less serious fashionista joggers.

## **Chapter 7. Conclusions**

### **7.1 Introduction**

A significant volume of research seems to indicate that self-esteem is implicated as a driver of many self-motives. Moreover sport participation has also been shown as implicated in the mechanism for achieving these goals. However there is far less specific evidence available on how enthusiast running within adult females acts as a platform of these self-motives. Moreover the role of running brands, as a facilitator appears to have received little attention in academic work despite the sums spent by marketing on brand promotion in the category.

### **7.2 Overview**

The implications of this research would appear far-reaching. It continues to be assumed in many circles of management that consumers act as economic rationalists. They compare and contrast the various utilities on offer and make decision regarding brand choice on the most attractive rational proposition. This research shows that many consumers suffer irrational anxieties over their self-identity and endure painful experiences when their self-esteem drops in response to difficult life events. Running for many of these respondents was not a rational decision to exercise in order to improve cardiovascular health. Rather it had deep and often hidden meaning bound up in the self-esteem and insecurities of the individual.

The act of running provides a platform for many of the self-motives postulated at the beginning of this paper. It acts as a source for self-affirmation; it helps to reframe body self-scheme; it facilitates important social connections; it provides a source of self-validation; and can be used as a contingency for self-worth. It has also allowed many of the respondents to achieve previously unattainable self-expansion opportunities.

### **7.3 Limitations**

This research has been carried out using qualitative research on a small scale, with a purposive sampling strategy. As such it has significant limitations. Firstly the sampling technique itself was based on recommendations with the author requesting respondents who were articulate and happy to reveal their emotions. Shy inarticulate and poorly educated runners were likely to have been excluded.

Secondly any qualitative research project is highly likely to introduce bias. The values of the interviewer colouring the interview flow, inappropriate probing or the lack of it and lack of candour from respondents are all potential sources of error. Thirdly the research was carried out in the London area only within the UK. This research has therefore yet to be validated within other geographic regions if it's findings are to have a broader implication. Finally it must be recognised that the interviewer is not an expert moderator and whilst every effort was taken to ensure best practise it remains a small risk. However having expressed these concerns, the results do appear to show a relatively high degree of consistency with previous academic work and would indicate that the results being in mind the above limitations terms remain valid.

#### **7.4 Implications for future research**

The implications for this research are two fold. Firstly, that in order to understand the behaviour of athletes any research future must always include an assessment of the athlete's self-esteem and the likely self-motives in play driving motivation and behaviour. Sport for many is an important source of self-esteem and participation behaviour is likely to have been heavily influenced by the need to achieve self-motive goals. Secondly brand owners must recognise the esteem motives of their sports participation target consumers. For some achievement and brand status may be paramount, but for others as we have seen in this research, there are far more complex and less intuitive forces at work that require careful analysis and interpretation.



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