



## LJMU Research Online

Ronkainen, NJ, Shuman, A and Xu, L

**"You challenge yourself and you're not afraid of anything!" Women's Narratives of Running in Shanghai**

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/9193/>

### Article

**Citation** (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

**Ronkainen, NJ, Shuman, A and Xu, L (2018) "You challenge yourself and you're not afraid of anything!" Women's Narratives of Running in Shanghai. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. pp. 1-29. ISSN 0741-1235**

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact [researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk)

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/>





## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

44 accomplishment and social affiliation (Major, 2001). Furthermore, Hanson, Madaras, Dicke and  
45 Buckworth (2015) found that runners reported different motivations based on the distances they  
46 raced, with ultramarathoners scoring higher on life meaning and lower on weight and health  
47 concerns than participants in half and full marathon events. Indeed, tourism around running  
48 events booms in China (e.g., Huang, Mao, Wang, & Zhang, 2015) as in elsewhere, providing  
49 runners space to perform or even centralize their runner identities and advance their running  
50 careers (Shipway & Jones, 2007). Although a paucity of research exists on runners' identity  
51 construction in China, a number of studies from the Global North on gender identity in running  
52 (Busanich, McGannon, & Schinke, 2012; Ronkainen, Watkins, & Ryba, 2016) and women's  
53 running experiences in particular (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Griffin, 2010; McGannon, McMahon,  
54 & Gonsalves, 2017; Little, 2017) have illustrated how women negotiate often conflicting  
55 discourses surrounding athletic identity and femininity. Although women are increasingly taking  
56 part in distance running across the globe, their running practices are often constructed within  
57 hegemonic discourses surrounding femininity focused on the ideal feminine body and health,  
58 rather than athletic achievement (Busanich et al., 2012; Griffin, 2010; Little, 2017). However, it  
59 has also been shown how some women resist such understandings of running, focusing on their  
60 accomplishments as athletes rather than on running as an instrument to construct ideal femininity  
61 (Hanold, 2010; McGannon et al., 2017).

62 The recent enthusiasm for distance running in China is moreover in line with academic  
63 studies that show how the new Chinese, urban middle-class are encouraged to transform their  
64 bodies through self-improvement (Song & Lee 2010; Yang 2011), to take individual  
65 responsibility in finding success and happiness in their lives (Zhang 2014, 2015), and to be  
66 independent, competitive, risk-taking, and forward-looking (Liu, 2008). However, in contrast to

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

67 countries such as the United States or Canada where approximately 45 percent of runners in full  
68 marathon events are women, in China women only account for one fifth of marathon participants  
69 (Andersen, 2015). Informal surveys produced by Chinese websites nevertheless suggest that a  
70 growing number of young (under age 30), unmarried women are taking up running as a leisure  
71 practice (Sohu, 2016).

72 No qualitative study to date has examined the gender dynamics within running culture in  
73 China. However, several studies have identified and examined an increase in structural gender  
74 inequalities in recent decades (Fincher 2014; Tatli, Ozturk, & Hong 2016). Most women,  
75 especially those in the urban middle-class, must find personal solutions to tackling the “double  
76 burden” of having a career and caring for their family (Tatli et al., 2016). Following the nation’s  
77 turn away from high socialism, which encouraged all women to pursue full-time work outside  
78 the home, and its rapid transformation into a market economy, urban middle-class women are  
79 now facing growing pressure to return to the domestic private sphere when family income allows  
80 for it (Sun & Chen 2015), to focus their attention on bodily appearance (Yang 2011), and – with  
81 the recent relaxations of the “one-child” policy and introduction of a new “two-child” policy – to  
82 have more children (Shan, 2016). There thus is a clear tension for these women: on the one  
83 hand, they are encouraged to be independent individuals who are competitive, pursue an  
84 advanced degree and have a good career; on the other hand, they are expected to acquiesce and  
85 retreat to the private sphere, while raising children and maintaining an ideal bodily appearance  
86 (Liu, 2014). In this context, we wondered, how do women use running to negotiate the tensions  
87 they face? What does running mean to them and how do they relate it to their broader lives?

88 This article draws upon life story interviews we conducted with 14 female runners living in  
89 Shanghai, most of whom had taken up running in the prior two to three years. Shanghai has an

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

90 especially vibrant running culture and has for years been at the forefront of Chinese market  
91 reforms, boasting an urban middle-class that is consumerist, individualist, and concerned with  
92 adopting “modern” lifestyles (Sun & Wang, 2010). These interviews took place within a broader  
93 project in which 16 men were also interviewed, but in this paper, we focus exclusively on the  
94 women in order to provide a closer analysis of how they narrated their running practices within  
95 global and local discourses on running, health, and gender.

### 96 **Gender tensions and self-cultivation in a neoliberal China**

97       Within the last few decades, under the direction of the government, Chinese society has gone  
98 through major economic reform and growth, and processes of globalization and social  
99 stratification have brought many changes to the ways in which people negotiate their identities  
100 (Kim, Brown, & Fong, 2017; Liu, 2014; Wang, 2008). This helps explain why significant value  
101 differences exist between generations living in big cities such as Shanghai (Sun & Wang, 2010),  
102 with younger members of the growing middle-class less concerned about collectivistic values  
103 and more focused on individualistic pursuits of self-enrichment, educational and professional  
104 success, and leisure activities (Liu, 2008; Wang, 2008).

105       The state has colluded with market forces to simultaneously help fuel the rise of this  
106 urban middle-class. Several scholars have noted that the Chinese government has increasingly  
107 ruled according to a form of neoliberal governmentality that indirectly controls society by  
108 encouraging its citizens to take individual responsibility for their health and well-being (Liu,  
109 2008; Zhang, 2014). These self-disciplined neoliberal subjects are ostensibly in control and free  
110 to make their own decisions; they are autonomous and self-regulating in their “freedom to  
111 upgrade their bodies and minds responsibly” (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005, p. 217). These  
112 urbanites are, in other words, focused on building their status in society by increasing their

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

113 embodied cultural capital through adopting new lifestyle habits and dispositions as well as their  
114 *suzhi*, a term loosely translated as “human quality” but referring to a broad spectrum of  
115 “qualities” that are supposedly self-cultivated, such as being well-educated and morally sound  
116 (Xu, Fu, & Xi 2014). Bodily or physical *suzhi* (*shenti suzhi*) specifically refers to the quality of  
117 one’s body and its health, which can be maintained through individual self-practices.

118 Accompanying the focus on individual self-cultivation, the government has further transferred  
119 its previous responsibilities for social and welfare services (including health care), to the free  
120 market. In other words, these services are now the responsibility of corporations and private  
121 companies rather than the state, with individuals and families increasingly responsible for their  
122 own health and well-being (Zhang 2014). Combined with the increasing stress from an ultra-  
123 competitive society that is changing very quickly, this has led to a surge in the psychological,  
124 psychotherapy, self-help, and wellness industries, as people try to cope with stress, find balance,  
125 and “cultivate happiness” in their lives (Zhang, 2014, 2015).

126 The slogan “men and women are equal” (*nannu pingdeng*) was a hallmark of socialist life in a  
127 party-state that aimed to employ everyone in an effort reach national labor production goals.  
128 Gender equality under high socialism thus meant that women often worked full-time outside the  
129 home, even while they were also still held responsible for domestic work. Prior to market reform,  
130 services such as childcare and healthcare were, however, often provided by the state (Tatli et al.,  
131 2016). In short, the state pushed women to work full-time and made efforts to assure it would  
132 happen. These days, the market and individuals are now held responsible for dealing with  
133 existing gender inequalities. This transfer has created a situation in which gender inequalities are  
134 not always visible and are actually growing, as attention is deflected away from existing  
135 structural inequalities and onto individuals and their families (Tatli et al., 2016). Even female

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

136 managers justify treating men and women differently in the name of remaining competitive in  
137 the market (ibid); they fail to make the connection that the system itself favors an ideal male  
138 worker. Thus, if a working woman faces a work-family conflict, the problem should be resolved  
139 by the individual rather than involving state or organizational forces.

140 Essentialist gender discourses have also gained strength with the rise of free-market  
141 neoliberalism in China (Kim et al., 2017; Sun & Chen 2015; Yang, 2011). Kim et al. (2017)  
142 found that young adults from the one-child generation held strong stereotypes about gender-  
143 appropriate jobs and that men were generally expected to ensure the financial security of their  
144 families, whereas women were assumed to have more dependent roles. Yet, they also suggested  
145 that men tended to conform to rigid gender expectations, while women were more flexible in  
146 negotiating their identities and career choices, motivated by aspirations for upward mobility. An  
147 essentialist discourse is also apparent in lifestyle magazines that encourage urban middle-class  
148 women to retreat to the private sphere for the purposes of childrearing and domestic duties (Sun  
149 & Chen, 2015), and in the booming beauty industry, which encourages women to pay close  
150 attention to their bodily appearance (Yang, 2011) and to “indulge in the possibilities and  
151 pleasures of feminine expressions” (Liu, 2014, p. 20).

152 Moreover, these discourses are connected with a long-standing Confucian tradition in China  
153 that continues to place importance on women's role within the family as wife, mother, and  
154 caregiver. Heteronormative relationships are not only encouraged, they are expected, and same-  
155 sex relations remain a social taboo to the extent that some homosexuals engage in so-called  
156 contract marriages with the opposite sex in order to fulfill filial obligations (Engebretson 2014;  
157 Choi & Luo 2016). In short, one's sexuality is considered separate from or less relevant than  
158 adhering to these obligations. Marriage is especially considered “the principle rite of passage to



Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

159 hetero-gendered adulthood” and dissidence in any form is frowned upon (Engebretson 2009, p.  
160 5). Women especially face pressure to marry from their families and from a mainstream media  
161 obsessed with stigmatizing unmarried women as “leftover” (Fincher 2014). As Yang (2011)  
162 noted, it is also still socially unacceptable for a married woman to remain child-free – a fact  
163 reinforced by the recent adoption of the “two-child policy” recently introduced by the Chinese  
164 government (Shan, 2016).

165 **Gender and sport**

166 The academic discourse on women’s sport in the Global North has centered on an  
167 observation that, despite advances in women’s participation rates, it remains a profoundly  
168 gendered institution where men are considered naturally more skilled and competent (Cooky,  
169 Messner, & Musto, 2015; Messner, 2009; Wachs, 2005). For example, Messner (2009) argued  
170 that young sportswomen are often positioned as less knowledgeable and have limited access to  
171 information that could help them develop competence and autonomy in their practice. Several  
172 studies have also shown that vast majority of media coverage continues to focus on men’s sport  
173 and perpetuate the norm of male superiority (Cooky et al., 2015). While sporting men are  
174 portrayed as strong and skillful, for women their physical attractiveness or role as a girlfriend,  
175 wife or mother is emphasized in textual and visual representations (Buisse & Embser-Herbert,  
176 2004; Cooky et al., 2015).

177 In China, although there is a paucity of information on women involved in contemporary  
178 leisure sport, scholarship on elite athletes and gender (Dong, 2003; Brownell, 2001) highlights  
179 the same gender inequalities that exist more broadly in society. Elite sportswomen’s ambitions  
180 and life goals are typically described as revolving around marriage and family commitments,  
181 which, because of the inevitable “double burden,” have sometimes been temporarily postponed

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

182 due to athletic commitments (Dong, 2003; Brownell 2001). Moreover, as Brownell (2001) points  
183 out, female athletes have largely conformed to essentialist gender discourses and rarely  
184 questioned the one-sidedness of this burden. Thus, these elite female athletes continue to  
185 perpetuate a hegemonic, heteronormative, and male-dominated script that reinforces gender  
186 inequalities in athletic careers.

187 In her analysis of gender constructions in *Runner's World*, Abbas (2004) argued that, despite  
188 the seemingly inclusive nature of running culture, gender inequality is “naturalized” in distance  
189 running (i.e., the ideal runner is a male), and female bodies are constructed as “barriers” to  
190 achievement. Overcoming these barriers was an individual responsibility within a discourse that  
191 presumed running as an equal opportunity bodily practice. Other studies have also highlighted  
192 gender narratives of running, such as women's running as a site for the pursuit of an ‘ideal’ size  
193 and shape feminine body (Little, 2017). However, Hanold (2010) found that women who  
194 participated in ultramarathons (distances over the classic marathon) resisted such understandings  
195 of the running body, focusing more on what their bodies could *do*, rather than what they looked  
196 like.

197 Chinese sports media follows a similar pattern to that mentioned by Abbas (2004) in which  
198 the ideal runner (or leisure athlete) is presumed to be male. However, the Chinese media on  
199 running is more blatant in following a gender discourse that renders women's bodies as objects  
200 to be beautified and cared for, thus largely silencing alternative narratives for understanding the  
201 running body and practice. As the organizers of the women's half marathon in Beijing stated,  
202 “the run aimed to offer female runners a way to show their beauty and vibrancy” (Yang, 2016).  
203 Similarly, in the women's section of “Running World” website  
204 (<http://www.paobushijie.com/women>), we found that a vast majority of the stories related to

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

205 achieving an ideal feminine body (thin and toned) through running and other exercises. A few  
206 stories also addressed the fear of becoming “too” muscular through running, ensuring women  
207 that running would not lead to excessive muscle gain. One described how to use makeup so it  
208 would stay on when running. Although stories related to body modification dominated the  
209 content, several also addressed the mental health and well-being aspect of running, suggesting  
210 that running could increase life quality and happiness. These reinforce the notion that individuals  
211 are responsible for taking control of their own lives. Articles provided advice on how to learn to  
212 enjoy or even fall in love with running. Often these tips – in relation to training and psychology –  
213 were shared by fashion models rather than athletes, exercise scientists, or professionals in  
214 psychology. Notably, none of the articles in the women’s section (in contrast to the site as a  
215 whole) was focused on performance enhancement or scientific training knowledge, though one  
216 recent article encouraged women to challenge themselves by trying to complete a longer distance  
217 than what they had achieved before.

### 218 **Methodology**

219 The present study draws upon narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009)  
220 and a life story approach (Atkinson, 2002) to explore meanings that women assign to their  
221 experiences in distance running. Within narrative inquiry, stories are considered as our primary  
222 means of making sense of our experiences and communicating them to others (Riessman, 2008).  
223 While personal stories draw on embodied, lived experiences, narrative approaches conceptualize  
224 these stories as sociocultural constructions in that they are always dependent on narrative and  
225 discursive resources that the storyteller has access to. The more stories we can access, the more  
226 openings we have to understand ourselves in different ways (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). When  
227 evaluating our lives and thinking about our futures, we rely on our narrative resources and

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

228 culturally available “life scripts” about normative events that constitute a life course (Fivush,  
229 2010). In this study, we understand gender as an inextricable part of life scripts that at specific  
230 socio-cultural locations offer guidelines on how “a good life” should unfold (Spector-Mersel,  
231 2006).

232 This study draws on interviews with 14 women residing in Shanghai who had participated in  
233 leisure running for 1-10 years (average 3.2 years). The participants were native Chinese, aged  
234 24-46 with an average of 32.5 years (one woman did not want to disclose her age), and active  
235 runners. Seven women identified themselves as single, one as in a relationship, three as married,  
236 and three noted they were divorced. The participants were recruited via personal networks of the  
237 researchers, snowball sampling, and advertisement in social media. We explained to potential  
238 participants that we hoped to learn about “runners’ experiences”, indicating that we looked for  
239 people who self-identified as runners. The sampling method yielded a group of highly-educated  
240 and mostly white collar workers, many of whom had either studied abroad or worked in  
241 international companies.

242 In the interviews, participants were first invited to share stories from childhood, family, and  
243 school, and the ways in which sport or exercise had (or had not) been a part of their youth. We  
244 then probed into educational experiences and current work and family situation. In addition to  
245 general questions about the life course, such as “did you participate in sports growing up?” and  
246 “how did you get started in running?”, we also asked direct questions related to gender, such as  
247 “is it better to be a man or woman for running?”, and encouraged our interviewees to qualify and  
248 elaborate on their responses. Participants were interviewed in cafés and researchers’ offices, and  
249 the interviews lasted an average of 83 minutes.

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

250 Ten interviews were conducted in English by the first author and four in Chinese by the third  
251 author. All interviews were transcribed and those conducted in Chinese were translated into  
252 English. Although there are always challenges in interviewing participants in non-native  
253 languages and in translation, our analytical focus was on identifying broad themes, storylines and  
254 cultural narrative resources, rather than on, for example, specific linguistic strategies. We found  
255 that using English in interviews was not a major drawback because most participants had studied  
256 abroad, worked in international companies, or had numerous foreign friends, or all of the above.

257 We employed both thematic and performative approaches in our analysis of the interviews  
258 (Riessman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). With the thematic approach, we sought to discern  
259 common elements or “whats” of the stories, focusing on discerning themes that emerged as  
260 building blocks of the stories. The responses we received varied from person to person, but we  
261 did notice common patterns: the majority of our interviewees cited physical and mental health  
262 and bodily appearance as major reasons to begin or continue running, and many gained  
263 knowledge about running through social media and running clubs. However, as we will  
264 demonstrate below, women also often identified running as an autonomous, confidence boosting  
265 activity. After discerning these emerging themes, we used a performative analysis to determine  
266 the ways in which the narratives were communicated, and what the speakers sought to  
267 accomplish by telling particular kinds of stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). In this phase, we were  
268 interested in finding out how speakers positioned themselves in relation to common gender  
269 narratives and life scripts, how they located different actors in their stories, and what experiences  
270 were included or omitted. In doing so, we also sought to be reflexive about how our positioning  
271 influenced our developing interpretations.

272  
273  
274  
275  
276  
277  
278  
279  
280  
281  
282  
283  
284  
285  
286  
287  
288  
289  
290  
291  
292  
293

## Findings

### **“I was never a physically active person”**

Most women constructed narratives where running and sports were largely absent from their childhood and youth. As Ms. Zhou (30) explained:

When I was little I always pictured myself as someone probably doing well in academic subjects but really, really weak in physical aspects. I always felt that I couldn't run, I couldn't throw... In high school, the amount of academic work was overwhelming. We were facing lots of pressure. Exercise was just to keep you from getting sick.

Women's narratives from youth frequently emphasized academic education and dealing with significant pressure in competition for university admission (Liu, 2014). Ms. Cheng (37) was one of the few women who had been involved in her school's athletics team, but “my mom talked me out of the team because of school work”. Most women did, however, feel encouraged to engage in moderate exercise for the sake of health (i.e., preventing illness), a belief that likely stems from a combination of traditional Chinese medicine and societal remnants of Maoist period high socialism (Hoeman, Ku, & Ohl, 1996; Shuman, 2014). As Ms. Wei (30) recalled:

In my childhood I always got sick. My dad said, ‘maybe you should do some exercise, to keep you from getting sick’. So I started to run. (...) In the Uni(versity), like all of a sudden, I got really healthy. After that, I didn't run much, just in some [physical education] classes.

In describing their youth, most women recalled essentialist discourses of “natural” gender differences in sports skills and stated they had few opportunities to develop athletically. Sport activities were often constructed as conflicting with cultural discourses on femininity and the ideal feminine body:

Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

294 Ms. Zhang (age not disclosed): Because of the nature of the education system, it is thought  
295 that females cannot do so many sports. You can read about this in Chinese books, about how  
296 a female is supposed to be gentle and soft, lacking in muscle.

297 Interviewer: Do you think this influenced you?

298 Ms. Zhang: Yes. After I became a teenager, I stopped doing any kind of exercise. I wanted to  
299 stay slim, to be more female, in terms of physique, less muscular.

300 All our participants started their current running practices in adulthood (some as university  
301 students). The decision to (re)start running in adult life was most often constructed as a  
302 transformative experience (Griffin & Phoenix, 2016), narrated within circulating discourses on  
303 health and the ideal female body. Losing weight was identified as the most “natural” reason to  
304 start running. As Ms. Tang (30) put it, “everyone wants to look beautiful”, thus confirming the  
305 dominant narratives offered in the media surrounding women’s running.

306 Several women also mentioned that they began running as a way to better take care of  
307 themselves both mentally and physically. Many explained that they used running to deal with  
308 pressure in studies or work. The construction of running as a means to prevent illness also re-  
309 emerged within this context, such as in Ms. Zhang’s story: “When I moved back to China [from  
310 Europe], I earned more money than before. But I felt less secure, so I had to build up my muscle,  
311 to take care of myself, otherwise, if I get ill it could be expensive”. Illustrating the insecurities of  
312 the health care system in China, she explained that running was her means “to be independent,  
313 strong and self-sufficient”. These narratives also reflect the increasingly ingrained belief in  
314 contemporary China that, in order to deal with relentless competition and pressure (and become  
315 successful), one must take individual responsibility to employ self-care tactics and ensure well-  
316 being (Zhang, 2014).

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

317 Yet, although our participants talked about stress relief, their simultaneous focus on  
318 achieving an ideal female body through running reveals that running was also a source of  
319 pressure for some women. We also noticed that, as they continued their running practices, all the  
320 women we interviewed had eventually found a competitive element within themselves –  
321 meaning in most cases running faster or longer distances. Running thus became an achievement  
322 domain involving pressures and stresses of its own.

**323 Running knowledges**

324 Although women frequently told stories about their own agency in beginning running  
325 practices, it was clear that most often their “progression” in running had been facilitated by  
326 running knowledges constructed and shared by men. Many women were explicit about their  
327 reliance on men (e.g., boyfriends and training partners) in providing advice in training methods  
328 and other running-related information, thus confirming a gendered pattern in the construction of  
329 sport expertise (e.g., Messner, 2009). In these stories women themselves seemed to reinforce  
330 essentialist gender discourses and be complicit to a gender order that at other times they sought  
331 to break. Ms. Gao (35), for example, described her male friend’s role in her first marathon as  
332 such:

333 Ms. Gao: He prepared everything for me.

334 Interviewer: Ok. Did he make a training plan for you, which you then followed?

335 Ms. Gao: Yes. And the clothing, and running shoes, and so on – everything.

336 A similar story about her first marathon experience was told by Ms. Yang (29):

337 I have a colleague from the company’s Boston office. He ran quite a few Boston marathons.

338 He shared with me the training schedules to do the full marathon with 50 or 45 weeks of



Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

339 training (...) And I also had a friend who ran with me in the marathon. He was talking with  
340 me and gave me some good advice during the run on how to save energy.

341 An exception to the clear pattern in the gendered distribution of running knowledge was Ms.  
342 Zhuang (37), who had run short and middle distance events in school. She considered herself as  
343 capable of figuring out her training alone. As she explained:

344 I began to collect information on the internet, like what to pay attention to before a full  
345 marathon. It was said that you had to run 30 km three weeks before the race. Then I made my  
346 plans, according to what was on the internet, about how long I would run each day. I ran that  
347 30 km three weeks before the event and I could manage it, which was how I got my confidence.

348 Although Ms. Zhuang (37) explained that she was self-directed in accumulating training  
349 knowledge, she nevertheless interestingly noted that it had given her confidence – a gendered  
350 theme we explore in the next section.

### 351 **Building confidence, claiming autonomy**

352 Nearly all women explicitly claimed that running had helped build their self-confidence in some  
353 way. For many, confidence came through a process of overcoming certain challenges, such as  
354 adding distance to their runs, employing new training methods, or in completing a race for the  
355 first time. These narratives became sites where women, to different degrees, challenged  
356 essentialist gender discourses and claimed competence, rather than dependence, in running. Ms.  
357 He (34) was one of the women who most strongly challenged dominant gender norms. She  
358 attributed having joined a group of like-minded runners (that included other women) as both  
359 having helped her dispel a perception that women were physically weak and as also providing  
360 training that makes her confident to face challenges. As she stated,

361 You find your group, your interest and people like you. It's like wow, cool! Girls don't really

Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

362 wear makeup, they wear sports clothes. They're not afraid of showing their muscles, they're  
363 strong. And we sweat a lot together, we train very hard and we feel like you challenge  
364 yourself and you're not afraid of anything. I feel the power when I meet this group... that's  
365 the life I want to have.

366 On other occasions, however, self-confidence was actually boosted through conforming to  
367 dominant ideals of femininity and gaining validation from others. Ms. Zhou (31) described how,  
368 after she started doing yoga and running regularly, "people would comment, oh, you look well.  
369 You're looking very fit, like your butt looks nice." This focus on physical, bodily transformation  
370 is in line with societal pressure for women to take self-initiative in beautifying themselves (Yang  
371 2011). Yet although Ms. Zhou said she found such comments encouraging, it is worth noting that  
372 none of the women claimed that bodily appearance was the only or even primary reason why  
373 they continued to run in the long term. In Ms. Zhou's case, consistent running practices had built  
374 up her confidence to be successful in other sports activities. She described how she had  
375 unsuccessfully tried to learn how to swim in graduate school and given up because she was  
376 afraid of the water, stating "you need to overcome a fear like that." She stated that she now felt  
377 "more confident" in her physical ability, adding "not only can I achieve my academic goals but I  
378 can also be strong and physically active... last summer I started to learn swimming again." In  
379 short, she trusted her ability to succeed physically (as well as academically), learn new skills, and  
380 had the confidence to actively try other activities. She stated:

381 I also started going to the gym and started doing weights... [Laughing] I would have  
382 never imagined myself doing that before, that wouldn't fit my image of myself. But after  
383 running, I go, well, I can squat, I can do that.

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

384 For our interviewees this new sense of self-determination also extended beyond sport skills,  
385 sometimes helping them develop a sense of control over their own well-being. Ms. He (34)  
386 explicitly stated that she began running as a way to gain direction after ending a long  
387 relationship: "I wanted to find something that I can do every day - that gives me energy and  
388 keeps me alive. So I started running every day at the gym." Similarly, Ms. Huang (40) cited  
389 running as her emotional crutch through difficult times, including a divorce: "If I run less, it  
390 affects my emotions, I become depressed. Pressure from work and family can cause this, so I  
391 need to exercise to feel good."

392 Overall, women's stories about gaining confidence or a new sense of self also point towards  
393 an omitted narrative of lacking self-confidence prior to taking up running. As indicated in their  
394 stories, many of our interviewees did not believe they possessed any athletic qualities before  
395 initiating a running practice, an understanding that draws upon essentialist discourses of gender  
396 in China (Liu, 2014). Ms. Zhang (age not disclosed) explained that, when many of her foreign  
397 running friends signed for the famous Berlin marathon, she had not (yet) dared to do so: "to run a  
398 marathon, especially for a female, you really need to make up your mind to do that. So I was not  
399 ready." She explained that being a 'serious' female runner was still quite exceptional in China  
400 and against the normative expectations for being a woman: "many Chinese women join the  
401 group but few of them are serious runners, they can't run regularly." Although she maintained  
402 that she was different in her ability to commit to her training, she simultaneously held that  
403 running a marathon was not something that a woman could typically do. Yet, she maintained  
404 that, after long training and determination, at least a half-marathon would be possible for her in  
405 the future.

406 **Managing family responsibilities**

407 Two women we interviewed had children who lived at home, while another had two older  
408 children who had left home (for boarding schools abroad?) before she began running. For them,  
409 although motherhood and running could co-exist, they did not always find it easy. As Ms. Huang  
410 (40) with two children explained:

411 Ms. Huang: [In the beginning,] I ran by myself on the track while the kids played on the  
412 grass. I could run laps, still seeing them. Then I met a group of runners there and they  
413 suggested I join them. They always have a monthly race. I said I can't come because of  
414 my parental responsibilities. They helped in organizing babysitters.

415 Ms. Huang, who was divorced for two years at the time of the interview, explicitly noted that it  
416 had always been her responsibility to take care of the children, even during her marriage. Ms.  
417 Zhuang (37) similarly described taking care of her child as her responsibility, even if her husband  
418 and her parents were at home:

419 Ms. Zhuang: I get up at 5 am and come back [from running] at 6 am. My kid gets up at 7  
420 am, and he goes to school after the morning routines. It's perfect time management. In  
421 the evening, I stay with my kid for his homework, and he finishes at about 8 - 9 pm. I'm  
422 able to go out [for a run] at 9:15 pm the latest.

423 Although Ms. Zhuang maintained that her family was "supportive" of her running, her narrative  
424 positioned herself as the main caregiver of their child, especially regarding his education. That is,  
425 she explained that her leisure time was reserved only for those early and late hours when it  
426 would not interfere with her child's needs. She could thus avoid potential feelings of guilt and  
427 selfishness, which have been noted as common concerns for mothers pursuing sports activities in  
428 Western contexts (e.g., Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017). In her words, "I deal with him first. I'll

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

429 ensure everything is fine with him before I go out for a run.” She also specifically mentioned her  
430 involvement in her child’s homework routine, a common task for many urban Chinese mothers  
431 who take exclusive responsibility for childrearing and their children’s education (due to a lack of  
432 husband involvement, some women have described this as “widowed parenting”) (Chen, 2017).  
433 In this interview and that with another mother, this gender order - where women were almost  
434 solely responsible for childrearing - was considered natural; husbands were described as  
435 accepting that their wives run, but did not actively encourage or help facilitate it by, for example,  
436 shouldering childcare responsibilities or even coming to cheer for their wives at running events.  
437 Indeed, husbands played very little role in these women’s narratives, which instead focused on  
438 running as an activity that could only take place for a mother once the rest of her familial  
439 obligations had been fulfilled.

440 Lastly, we asked all participants to anticipate their lives 5 to 10 years in the future. In these  
441 stories, many women predicted getting married and having children, in line with the standard  
442 heteronormative expectation that is difficult to avoid “regardless of gender or sexuality”  
443 (Engebretson, 2017, p. 165). Yet, these women generally constructed stories where their (future)  
444 husbands were equal caretakers of the children and their running practices would not interfere  
445 with motherhood. Some even claimed that being a runner could actually have a positive impact  
446 on future children (McGannon et al., 2017). Ms. Tang (30), single at the time of interview, was  
447 quite clear about criteria for a future partner:

448 I think my partner will take care of the children when I am running (...) Sharing the  
449 responsibility is what a partner should do. So I will [still] have my time to do things like  
450 running which I think is a part of a quality life.

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

451 At the age of 30, Ms. Tang technically falls into the stigmatized category of “leftover  
452 women” (Fincher 2014), though it should be noted that neither she nor the other women  
453 explicitly brought this up for discussion. Nevertheless, it is clear that single women’s narratives  
454 of the future drew upon a different life script than of those who had already married and had  
455 children. Single women envisioned futures in which, followed a marriage and children, they  
456 would not be solely burdened with family responsibilities and still have plenty of leisure time to  
457 pursue individual interests. These life scripts drew from contemporary discourses of the  
458 “modern, autonomous female” (Liu, 2014) and imagined gender equality in work, home, and  
459 leisure. Yet, as other studies have indicated, men sometimes draw upon more rigid narratives  
460 surrounding masculinity (Kim et al., 2017). These women may run into conflicts in the future  
461 when negotiating relationships, leisure, and familial obligations.

462 **“Not like other women”**

463 A number of our participants constructed narratives where they distanced themselves as  
464 runners from other women, and from the media discourses surrounding women’s running. Many  
465 interviewees described other women who took up running as undedicated and overly focused on  
466 socializing, appearance, or fun rather than athletic development. In most cases, they uncritically  
467 attributed such “faults” to the individual, rather than addressing broader gender inequalities and  
468 cultural pressures to conform to an ideal femininity. As Ms. Zhang (age not disclosed) explained:

469 You can see that I am a serious runner, but I don’t know about other Chinese women’s  
470 motivations to join the group. Maybe some other women’s interests are different from mine,  
471 maybe they just do it for fun. They do it [for a while], and then they stop...

472 Similarly, when asked about whether she would consider joining a women-only training group,  
473 Ms. Cheng replied: “It’s better for [athletic] development if you’re running with boys. And some

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

474 female-only groups like to focus on showing their beauty. I don't like this." These women  
475 delineated themselves from "other Chinese women" by highlighting athletic pursuits behind their  
476 running practices, thus reproducing dominant gender narratives that position women as naturally  
477 lacking athletic qualities. Similar to findings in studies in the Global North (e.g., Rupperech &  
478 Matkin, 2012), these women took pride in their achievements noting that they were able to do  
479 things that other people – and especially most women – could not. Our interviewees also  
480 occasionally mentioned that many women were unlikely to become regular runners due to  
481 concerns about being exposed to sunshine or fear of gaining muscle mass, echoing discourses  
482 found in the women's section of the "Running World" website  
483 (<http://www.paobushijie.com/women>). Many women developed narratives that specifically  
484 sought to rebuke such notions and to distinguish themselves from the supposed stereotypical  
485 concerns of most women.

486 Similar to Griffin (2010), we found that constructions of women's running more broadly  
487 were framed by notions of running as a means for better health and socializing. However, on a  
488 personal level, many women embraced qualities of athleticism and competitiveness. While their  
489 stories exemplified experiences of personal empowerment through athletic achievement, such  
490 experiences remained at an individual level. That is, these narratives worked to sustain the  
491 "ideologies of difference" (Wachs, 2005, p. 527) and did little to challenge essentialist discourses  
492 that work to shape gender relations in Chinese culture (Kim et al., 2017). In asserting that most  
493 women were not up to being "serious" runners, our participants who were more competitive  
494 actually considered their gender an advantage, explaining that it was easier for them to succeed  
495 in races in the less competitive women's category.

496

**Discussion**

497        Within the growing, affluent Chinese middle-class, the search for health, well-being, and  
498 happiness constitute central concerns in life (Zhang, 2015). The “running craze” in China can be  
499 contextualized within these urban citizens’ broader concerns about “a good life”, which for our  
500 participants included not only material wealth, career and/or family, but also having meaningful  
501 leisure activities (Liu, 2008). Coinciding with a neoliberal governmentality that encourages  
502 people to develop individual autonomy and take personal responsibility for their health and well-  
503 being, our female runners indicated that running was a means to “take control” over their lives.  
504 Many women appeared to use running to achieve the ideal feminine body and to manage stress,  
505 but they simultaneously described their practices as empowering and derived from the self rather  
506 than something imposed on them (Yang, 2011). Furthermore, although there is a clear conformity  
507 to neoliberal discourses that displace social or governmental responsibility to that of the  
508 individual, on a personal level these runners experienced running as liberating and life-  
509 enhancing. In short, they found it to be an extremely self-fulfilling and worthwhile leisure  
510 activity. These findings extend previous studies from the Global North on women’s distance  
511 running as a sub-cultural context in which neoliberal discourses and middle-class values are  
512 normalized (see Hanold, 2010). This suggests that urban middle-class female runners in  
513 Shanghai largely make meaning of their running experiences through shared global narratives,  
514 rather than any particularly “Chinese” cultural discourse on health or physical culture.

515        Similar to scholarship on gender and sport in the Global North (e.g., Messner, 2009; Wachs,  
516 2005), and studies on gender relations in China (Liu, 2014; Kim et al., 2017), we also found that  
517 our participant narratives reproduced discourses of “natural” gender difference in sporting  
518 interests and athletic abilities. An assumed female inferiority was obvious when many of our



## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

519 interviewees described how they relied on men to help them train for marathons, and especially  
520 in their need to build confidence for pursuing such challenges. Although they often stated that  
521 anyone, regardless of gender, could run, to run well was constructed as an exceptional  
522 achievement for a woman. The “serious” female runners, by positioning themselves in  
523 opposition to the majority of women engaged in recreational running, did little to challenge  
524 discourses of female athletic inferiority.

525 Our study suggests that narratives surrounding gender and family roles are being contested  
526 in contemporary China, which was evident in the gap between women’s narrative imaginations  
527 of the future and the stories of those who were already married (or divorced) and had children.  
528 These narratives always followed a standard heteronormative script most likely because, as  
529 described previously, same-sex relations are still considered socially taboo in the face of filial  
530 obligations. Single women in their late 20s and early 30s were confident that they would still  
531 have their own time even if they had children, and that their future husbands would be at home  
532 with children while they went running. They also downplayed any potential difficulties in  
533 realizing their future script, assuming that their spouses would willingly share this vision. Their  
534 optimism and belief in retaining personal autonomy vis-à-vis familial obligations contrasted to  
535 the stories of the two women with young children – and studies previously mentioned – that  
536 indicate most urban women continue to shoulder the responsibility for childrearing.

537 While the majority of our participants deviated from what is considered a traditional female  
538 life script (i.e., they were over age 27 and unmarried, or had divorced), they did not express  
539 anxieties of being “leftover” or having failed in their relationships. By contrast, they often  
540 focused career possibilities and leisure pursuits, and when asked, they set high standards for  
541 potential future partners. It is important to emphasize, however, that these women, by virtue of

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

542 their backgrounds and lifestyles, came from a privileged group that does not represent all  
543 Chinese women. In other words, they were all highly educated, living in a first tier cosmopolitan  
544 city, many had international connections, and most came from white collar backgrounds or were  
545 white collar workers. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that most of them were relatively novice  
546 runners, which is likely to have influenced the meanings they assigned to running (see Hanson et  
547 al., 2015).

548 Running was a central theme for the middle-class, neoliberal life scripts that our participants  
549 developed. Yet, these narrative performances, with a focus on individual accomplishments and  
550 transformations, could be also read as attempts to keep a “success” narrative going by omitting  
551 experiences that might destabilize such self-narratives. For example, because non-  
552 heteronormative relations are still stigmatized in China (Engebretson, 2014; Wu, Mou, Wang, &  
553 Atkin, 2017), we did not explicitly ask about sexuality or intimate relationships in the interviews  
554 (and most of our participants did not venture into such topics). In future work, it would be  
555 valuable to further explore gender performative elements, and to expand the current study by  
556 examining Chinese women's leisure sport activities within a broader demographic.

### 557 **References**

- 558 Abbas, A. (2004). The embodiment of class, gender and age through leisure: A realist analysis of  
559 long distance running. *Leisure Studies*, 23, 159-175. doi:10.1080/0261436042000226354
- 560 Allen-Collinson, J. (2011). Feminist phenomenology and the woman in the running body. *Sport,*  
561 *ethics and philosophy*, 5, 297-313.
- 562 Andersen, J. J. (2015). *Research: Marathon performance across nations*. Retrieved from  
563 [www.runrepeat.com](http://www.runrepeat.com).

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

- 564 Atkinson, R. (2002). The life story interview. In J. F. Gubrium, & J. A. Holstein (Eds.),  
 565 *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 121-140). London: Sage.
- 566 Brownell, S. (2001). Athletes, fashion models, and urban mystique in China. N. N. Chen, C. D.  
 567 Clark, S. Z. Gottschang, & L. Jeffery (Eds.), *China urban: Ethnographies of contemporary*  
 568 *culture* (pp. 123-142). Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- 569 Busanich, R., McGannon, K. R., & Schinke, R. J. (2012). Expanding understandings of the body,  
 570 food and exercise relationship in distance runners: A narrative approach. *Psychology of*  
 571 *sport and exercise*, 13, 582-590.
- 572 Buysse, J. A. M., & Embser-Herbert, M. S. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport an analysis  
 573 of intercollegiate media guide cover photographs. *Gender & Society*, 18, 66-81.
- 574 Chen, Jingnan (2017, March 1). "How Chinese Education Leaves Mothers Overburdened."  
 575 *Sixth Tone*, Retrieved from  
 576 <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1999/How%20Chinese%20Education%20Leaves%20Mothers%20Overburdened>  
 577 <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1999/How%20Chinese%20Education%20Leaves%20Mothers%20Overburdened>
- 578 China Daily (2016, December 26). Marathon fever grips China in 2016. Retrieved from  
 579 [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-12/26/content\\_27777895.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-12/26/content_27777895.htm)
- 580 Choi, SYP & Luo, M. (2016). "Performative family: homosexuality, marriage and  
 581 intergenerational dynamics in China." *The British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 67, Issue 2,  
 582 260-280. doi: 10.1111/1468-4446.12196
- 583 Cooky, C., Messner, M. A., & Musto, M. (2015). "It's dude time!" A quarter century of  
 584 excluding women's sports in televised news and highlight shows. *Communication & Sport*, 1-  
 585 27. doi:10.1177/2167479515588761

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

- 586 Darroch, F., & Hillsburg, H. (2017). Keeping pace: Mother versus athlete identity among elite  
587 long distance runners. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 62, 61-68.  
588 doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.03.005
- 589 Dong, J. (2003). *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China: Holding up More than Half the*  
590 *Sky*. London: Frank Cass.
- 591 Engebretson, E. (2017). "Under Pressure: Lesbian-Gay Contract Marriages and Their Patriarchal  
592 Bargains." In Goncalo Santos and Stevan Harrell (Eds.), *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese*  
593 *Families in the Twenty-first Century* (pp. 163-181). Seattle and London: University of  
594 Washington Press.
- 595 Engebretson, E. (2014). *Queer Women in Urban China*. London: Routledge.
- 596 Engebretson, E. (2009). Intimate Practices, Conjugal Ideals: Affective Ties and Relationship  
597 Strategies Among Lala (Lesbian) Women in Contemporary Beijing. *Sexuality Research &*  
598 *Social Policy*.
- 599 Financial Times (2016, January 4). China's middle class runs for its life. Retrieved from  
600 <https://www.ft.com/content/82d5a3aa-b2ce-11e5-8358-9a82b43f6b2f>
- 601 Freeman, M. (2007). Life "on holiday"? In defense of big stories. In M. Bamberg (Ed.),  
602 *Narrative—State of the art* (pp. 155-163). Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.
- 603 Greenhalgh, S. & Winckler, E.A. (2005). *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to*  
604 *Neoliberal biopolitics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 605 Griffin, M. (2010). Setting the scene: Hailing women into a running identity. *Qualitative*  
606 *Research in Sport and Exercise*, 2, 153-174.

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

- 607 Griffin, M., & Phoenix, C. (2016). Becoming a runner: Big, middle and small stories about  
608 physical activity participation later in life. *Sport, Education and Society*, 21, 11-27.  
609 doi:10.1080/13573322.2015.1066770
- 610 Hanson, N., Madaras, L., Dicke, J., & Buckworth, J. (2015). Motivational differences between  
611 half, full and ultramarathoners. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 38, 180-191.
- 612 Hanold, M. T. (2010). Beyond the marathon: (De) Construction of female ultrarunning bodies.  
613 *Sociology of sport journal*, 27, 160-177.
- 614 Huang, H., Mao, L. L., Wang, J., & Zhang, J. J. (2015). Assessing the relationships between  
615 image congruence, tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit in marathon tourism: the  
616 Shanghai International Marathon. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and  
617 Sponsorship*, 16, 46-66.
- 618 Hoeman, S. R., Ku, Y. L., & Ohl, D. R. (1996). Health beliefs and early detection among  
619 Chinese women. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 18, 518-533.
- 620 Kim, S. W., Brown, K., & Fong, V. L. (2017). How flexible gender identities give young women  
621 advantages in China's new economy. *Gender and Education*, 1-19.  
622 doi:10.1080/09540253.2016.1274380
- 623 Little, J. (2017). Running, health and the disciplining of women's bodies: The influence of  
624 technology and nature. *Health & place*, 46, 322-327. doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2016.11.011
- 625 Liu, F. (2008). Constructing the autonomous middle-class self in today's China: the case of  
626 young-adult only-children university students. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11, 193-212.
- 627 Liu, F. (2014). From degendering to (re) gendering the self: Chinese youth negotiating modern  
628 womanhood. *Gender and Education*, 26, 18-34
- 629 Major, W. F. (2001). The benefits and costs of serious running. *World Leisure Journal*, 43, 12-25.

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

- 630 Masters, K.S., Ogles, B.M., & Jolton, J.A. (1993). The development of an instrument to measure  
631 motivation for marathon running: The Motivations of Marathoners Scales (MOMS).  
632 Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 64, 134–143.  
633 doi:10.1080/02701367.1993.10608790
- 634 McGannon, K. R., McMahon, J., & Gonsalves, C. A. (2017). Mother runners in the blogosphere:  
635 A discursive psychological analysis of online recreational athlete identities. Psychology of  
636 Sport and Exercise, 28, 125-135.
- 637 Messner, M. (2009). *It's all for the kids: Gender, families, and youth sports*. Berkeley, CA:  
638 University of California Press.
- 639 Prichard, M., Yan, D., Yu, Y, & Wang, M. (2016, May 2). Globe-trotters driven by challenge.  
640 Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2016-](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2016-05/02/content_25000009.htm)  
641 [05/02/content\\_25000009.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sports/2016-05/02/content_25000009.htm)
- 642 Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- 643 Rodale (2012, November 21). Rodale Launches International Edition of Runner's World China.  
644 Retrieved from [http://www2.rodaleinc.com/newsroom/rodale-launches-international-](http://www2.rodaleinc.com/newsroom/rodale-launches-international-edition-emrunners-worldem-china)  
645 [edition-emrunners-worldem-china](http://www2.rodaleinc.com/newsroom/rodale-launches-international-edition-emrunners-worldem-china)
- 646 Ronkainen, N. J., Watkins, I., & Ryba, T. V. (2016). What can gender tell us about the pre-  
647 retirement experiences of elite distance runners in Finland?: A thematic narrative analysis.  
648 Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 22, 37-45.
- 649 Rupprecht, P. M., & Matkin, G. S. (2012). Finishing the race: Exploring the meaning of  
650 marathons for women who run multiple races. Journal of Leisure Research, 44, 308-331.
- 651 Shan, J. (2016, October 31). Two-child policy working, birthrate figures show. Retrieved from  
652 [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-10/31/content\\_27220568.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-10/31/content_27220568.htm)

## Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

- 653 Shipway, R., & Jones, I. (2007). Running away from home: Understanding visitor experiences  
654 and behaviour at sport tourism events. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 9, 373–  
655 383.
- 656 Shipway, R., & Holloway, I. (2016). Health and the running body: Notes from an ethnography.  
657 *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 51, 78-96. doi:10.1177/1012690213509807
- 658 Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2009). Narrative analysis and sport and exercise psychology:  
659 Understanding lives in diverse ways. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 10, 279-288.
- 660 Sohu, (2016, April 28). 重磅出品！详解 2015 中国跑者调查. Retrieved from  
661 <http://mt.sohu.com/20160428/n446661855.shtml>
- 662 Song, G., & Lee, T. K. (2010). Consumption, class formation and sexuality: Reading men's  
663 lifestyle magazines in China. *The China Journal*, 64, 159-177.
- 664 Spector-Mersel, G. (2006). Never-aging stories: Western hegemonic masculinity scripts. *Journal*  
665 *of Gender Studies*, 15, 67-82.
- 666 Sun, J., & Wang, X. (2010). Value differences between generations in China: A study in  
667 Shanghai. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13, 65-81.
- 668 Wachs, F. L. (2005). The boundaries of difference: Negotiating gender in recreational sport.  
669 *Sociological Inquiry*, 75, 527-547.
- 670 Wang, X. (2008) Divergent identities, convergent interests: the rising middle-income stratum in  
671 China and its civic awareness. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 17, 53-69.  
672 doi:10.1080/10670560701693070
- 673 Wu, Y., Mou, Y., Wang, Y., & Atkin, D. (2017). Exploring the de-stigmatizing effect of social  
674 media on homosexuality in China: an interpersonal-mediated contact versus parasocial-

Running Head: WOMEN'S RUNNING IN SHANGHAI

- 675 mediated contact perspective. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 1-18.  
676 doi:10.1080/01292986.2017.1324500
- 677 Xinhua (2016, January 9). More marathon races held in China in 2015. Retrieved from  
678 [http://china.org.cn/sports/2016-01/09/content\\_37536942.htm](http://china.org.cn/sports/2016-01/09/content_37536942.htm)
- 679 Xu, L., Fu, P. & Xi, Y. *Suzhi*: an indigenous criterion for human resources management in China.  
680 *Journal of Chinese Human Resource Management*, 5, 129-143.
- 681 Xue, J., Ge, M. & Zheng, Y. (29.06.2016). China's marathon and endurance running. Retrieved  
682 from <http://english.cri.cn/12394/2016/07/02/4203s932764.htm>
- 683 Yang, F. (2016, November 3). Half-marathon gets women running in Beijing. Retrieved from  
684 [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2016-11/03/content\\_27263735.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2016-11/03/content_27263735.htm)
- 685 Yang, J. (2011). Nenu and Shunu: Gender, body politics, and the beauty economy in China.  
686 *Signs*, 36, 333-357.
- 687 Zhang, L. (2014). Bentuhua: Culturing psychotherapy in postsocialist China. *Culture, Medicine,*  
688 *and Psychiatry*, 38, 283-305.
- 689 Zhang, L. (2015). Cultivating happiness: Psychotherapy, spirituality, and well-being in a  
690 transforming urban China. In Peter van der Veer, ed., *Handbook of Religion and the Asian*  
691 *City: Aspiration and Urbanization in the Twenty First Century*. Berkeley: University of  
692 California Press, 315-332.