Racing ecologies: Narratives of place, non-place, and placelessness in running 100 miles

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Background

-Sensitizing concepts for a phenomenological geography

- Socially constructed, these are always relational, contingent and continually folded into one another

Place - space which has social and emotional meaning; somewhere, “knowledge of place is a simple fact of experience” (Relph, 1976)

Non-place – effect detachment but afford accessibility; nowhere (Augé, 1995)

Placelessness – “the casual eradication of distinctive places” (Relph, 1976); standardization; otherness
Background
- ultramarathons and the possibility of a racing ecology

- Ultrarunning focus as rec and sport
- “100 miles is not that far…” (KarlMeltzer.com)
- Storytelling among trail runners…

Source: http://realendurance.com/summary.php
Problem & Purpose

- To explore the concepts of place, non-place, and placelessness through the lived experience narratives of 100-mile trail runners.

Place-making?

- Risk Mgt
- Officiating
- Provisions
- Benefits
Methods

- 16 finisher’s race reports (2014 to 2017)
- Riessman's (2008) thematic analysis
- Storification as narrative bricolage
- Trustworthiness: triangulation and member checking
Findings Overview

- Narrative themes
- Thick descriptions follow

Place:
- Identity
- Proximity
- Corporeal
- Juncture
- Landscape Values
- Sensory Diversity
- Accomplishment

Non-place:
- Inevitable Solitude
- Place Dissociation
- Nowhereness
- Detached Accessibility

Placelessness:
- Standardized Landscape
- Experiential Uniformity
- Non-distinctive Expression
The start of the race was exciting, and I had this feeling like being part of a band of adventurers setting out but not knowing what lies ahead...

The thick fog cover on Elliott’s Knob rendered my headlamp essentially useless and I could only see 2–3 feet in front of me and gauging distance based on other runners...

In spite of this adversity, I just kept plugging away and ran well through some gnarly/rocky technical terrain. It seemed like lots of folks were wiping out on the rocky descent off Crawford Mtn, so I considered myself lucky to make it through this section unscathed.
This was the key moment in the race. I got to the Dowells Draft aid station sometime around “blaze o’clock” & walked through the glittery streamers they had hanging. The volunteers, who were super helpful, let me know that the 3rd place female was only 13 minutes away and wasn’t looking great. The next section...was a long one and they gave me a little pep talk on nutrition before sending me off. They were awesome and made me feel like I was going out to war, which I kinda was. More miles, more climbing, more descending...
Narratives of Place

Landscape Values

The looming fall of darkness for the second time going on 26 hours of racing...is a huge slap in the face. We wanted to & did make it to a clearing a bit up on Elliott’s Knob to catch some remaining color...

Landscape Values

Last aid station, the unique thing about this one was sweet pie they had with pancakes, and a breakfast burrito...NO GELS!

Sensory Diversity

It was all surreal. It was one of the most amazing things ever crossing that finish line. I made it. I freaking made it.

Accomplishment
Narratives of Non-place

Inevitable Solitude
- I was wanting to and ending up talking about the same stuff and same stories with Daniel as I did with Kevin but I didn't even have energy to tell some of them.
- I eventually let them pass me cause I was tired of being around people when we weren't saying anything to each other.

Place Dissociation
- Now I was the one zoned out and could only concentrate on taking the next step and moving forward.
- I rarely listen to music when I run or race, but I just sensed that for a race like Grindstone, I was going to want something to take my mind off the pain and just pass the miles
- Let me introduce you to THE ONE AND ONLY SONG stuck in my head for 22+ hours...
Narratives of Non-place

Nowhereness

- I don’t remember much about the terrain or the hills or descents in this section.
- In the middle of nowhere I’m just sipping my water every 20 minutes or so and eating my energy gels about every 3 miles.
- Seemed liked forever, but then I’m at the next station, mile 88

Detached Accessibility

- My day was sort of like a roller coaster. For the first 35 miles, everything was smooth. The next 15 miles were rough, followed by 15 solid miles, then about 15 more rough miles. Luckily I had a solid last 20 miles to cap off the day.
But where was that road? The course was so well marked with pink ribbons and reflective strips hanging from tree branches and as I continued running I just kept looking and looking for the next ribbon. And every time I convinced myself that somehow I had gone off course I’d see another ribbon off in the distance. Or at least I would think I’d see another ribbon or reflector up ahead. Where was I now? I was reduced to simply moving from ribbon to ribbon with no real clue of where I was...
I was seeing bits and pieces of magic happen through the trees and I knew some good views were coming... but I was so close to the cutoffs, not worth stopping to take a picture though...
Narratives of Placelessness

Non-distinctive Expression

I guess they were just super tired, don’t blame them, but it sure was cool to hear your name...like they know who I am, like one of the top runners! LOL
Not just a tension between accessibility and proximity, the challenge lies in our understanding of design and management.
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<th>Implications</th>
<th>Disrupt Standardization</th>
<th>Reduce Prescriptives</th>
<th>Individualize</th>
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<td>Managers can engage participants more by being intentional about place-making. When appropriate, incorporate place-based provisions instead of a generic default.</td>
<td>Best practices have become overly rigid ‘rules’ and managers need to plan, operate, evaluate and make place-based decisions.</td>
<td>Participants expect a great experience. As much as possible, integrate a ‘personal touch’ that resonates with an experiential framework.</td>
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Selected References


