On the Re-Alienation Experiences of the Amateur Runners in Istanbul

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In contemporary mass culture, individuals are increasingly subjected to standardization, homogenization, and objectification, leading to experiences of alienation within the societal framework shaped by it. Despite efforts to fortify connections with oneself, the environment, society, and meaning, individuals may still find themselves immersed in alienation within the societal structure they inhabit. Through heightened awareness, individuals strive to reclaim their authentic identities, utilizing various means to distance themselves from alienation. However, this pursuit may paradoxically result in renewed ruptures in connections, as individuals encounter re-alienation, finding themselves ontologically identical yet formally distinct within the alienation process. Amidst the complexities of modern life, individuals often seek self-realization through recreational pursuits like running. Hence, this study endeavors to examine the phenomenon of re-alienation, particularly among amateur runners. By conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with runners in Istanbul, the study explores both the process of distancing from alienation and the experience of encountering re-alienation through running. Through its investigation, the study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse on alienation, self-realization, and re-alienation with the lens of critical communication studies. By analyzing the lived experiences of individuals, the research seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate dynamics of alienation and resilience in contemporary society. Research findings show that running as a recreational activity strengthens individuals' connections with themselves, nature, their social environment, meaning, and values, thereby allowing for a sense of autonomy to be achieved; however, due to social infrastructure and individual psychological tendencies, subject and object fetishes can be developed in relation to running activities, leading to experiences of re-alienation.

Keywords: *alienation, self-realization, mass culture, sports and recreational studies, critical communication studies*

Introduction

The concept of alienation has been used by many different disciplines over time and is of great importance for social sciences. Since it is a conceptualization on which important debates continue, especially in the fields of sociology and psychology, drawing the contours of the concept carries certain difficulties in itself. In this study, the concepts of sports and alienation will be discussed especially within the context of the act of running.

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The commercialization and superficialization of human relations and efforts by consumer culture and capitalism is seen as one of the reasons for the emergence of alienation. This situation, which also permeates sports culture, results in individuals seeking ways of escaping from it. Running functions as a symbol of escaping from the monotony and mediocrity of modern life, establishing a relationship with nature and searching for meaning in life, and is evaluated by individuals in this way. Nevertheless, factors such as fetishization of equipment, sponsorship relations, fetishization of the individual's own subject which are reflections of the commercialization of sports culture, can cause re-alienation of individuals seeking a way of getting away. In line with this aim, this study investigates whether the experience of re-alienation occurs by using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 33 amateur runners residing in Istanbul. In addition, it will be tried to reveal whether individual efforts and escape strategies can be used to break free from the pincer created by the duality of consumer culture and alienation.

Within the scope of the study, alienation as a concept will first be discussed and its boundaries will be tried to be drawn. After the alienation narrative in classical sociology, the relationship between the science of psychology and alienation will be revealed. This section will also include the effects of consumption on alienation. In the next section, studies on running and the experience of alienation will be included in the literature. Whether running can function to get rid of the negative effects of alienation experience will also be included in this section. Then, after the method used in the research and the purpose of the research are stated, the findings and results of the study will be examined. In the conclusion part of the study, in the light of the data obtained as a result of the research, it will be discussed that whether running can be used as a tool to get away from alienation or not.

The Concept of Alienation

It is possible to evaluate the concept of alienation as a theory that has been given importance within the fields of classical sociology and psychology which has also been handled from different perspectives. This makes it more difficult to explain the conceptualization and sharpen its contours. Hence, as in many studies focusing on alienation, this study will first try to trace the origins of the concept and clarify its meaning. When we go through the areas where the word has been used; As stated by Fromm (1990), the word alienation used to describe the mentally ill. "Aliene" in French and "alienado" in Spanish depicted psychosis, that is, a person who was completely detached from himself/herself. It was Hegel and Marx who used the word in different senses and argued that the individual, though sane in his daily actions, was in a state of distortion and limited detachment in social events (Fromm 1990, pp. 134–135). The use of the concept in everyday life demonstrates that it is highly related to the science of psychology from its point of origin. Marx, who treated the concept as a social phenomenon and made it one of the key concepts for social sciences, carried out his work in a period when the

foundations of factorization and capital accumulation were laid and acted from an economic basis.

As claimed by Marx, the phenomenon of alienation arose as a consequence of the order created by capitalism and cannot be addressed without it. Cevizci (1999) argues that according to Marx, the essence of human beings is revealed in creative activities that can enable them to change the world collectively or individually during work or study. As stated by Marx, the production process corresponds to an objectification, and material objects emerge with the concretization of product and labor independent of their creator. It is on this note that alienation arises, when the same man no longer recognizes himself in his product, which no longer appears as his own and stands in front of him as a separate force. Alienation occurs only under capitalism, because at the root of alienation is the appropriation by capitalists of the products created by others (Cevizci 1999, p. 907). According to Marx's understanding of alienation, the essence of the man could be revealed by work and labour. According to Kanungo (1979), as declared by Marx, labor is an existential issue. It is not merely an activity that one has to endure in order to feed oneself and survive (Kanungo 1979, p. 13). The fact that work becomes an obligation and therefore could be seen as one of the causes of alienation. This whole process, which takes place against the will of the individual, causes him to lose control over the most basic actions of his life and to become alienated layer by layer.

The most fundamental factors leading to alienation could be considered as the loss of autonomy and control. Barakat (1969) argues that alienation, taken in a Hegelian and Marxist context, is fundamentally related to powerlessness (Barakat 1969, p. 1). This corresponds to the first dimension of alienation mentioned by Marx, namely the process of alienation of man from his labor. As Demir (2018) points out, in Marx's understanding of alienation, people are alienated in four stages. In the first stage, people are alienated from the act of production, in the second stage they are alienated from their products, in the third stage they are alienated from themselves and in the fourth stage they are alienated from others in society. Alienation creates a chain process that affects both the individual and society (Demir 2018, p. 65). Although the first two stages are predominantly based on economic grounds, they also have psychological reflections due to the emphasis on the loss of power over one's labor and power. The closest stages resulting with psychological effects could be considered as the third and fourth stages. According to Cevizci (1999, p. 907), in the third stage of alienation, the worker is alienated from his nature, essence or species being, since the first two aspects of alienation deprive his productive activity of human qualities. And human beings are finally alienated from others because capitalism transforms human relations into market relations and therefore people are evaluated not by their human qualities but by their place or status in the market.

Even though there is an emphasis on the alienation of human beings from themselves and others, and this brings to mind psychological influences as mentioned, Marx's theory stands on a socialist line rather than an individualist imagination. Thus, it is essential that a study that endeavors to reveal the problem of alienation within single individuals and their small groups should include alienation in its psychological dimensions.

Psychology and Alienation

Erich Fromm, a member of the Frankfurt School which can be considered the cornerstone of critical communication studies and also known as one of the leading figures with his studies in the field of alienation claims that the objects worshipped by people in the industrial society have changed. Furthermore, the concept of idolatry should be reconsidered in this context. According to him, in the modern period, the individual has become an object of the blind economic forces that govern his/her life. Man now worships the product of his own labor and transforms himself/herself into an object. In this process, it is not only workers who are alienated, but everyone as a whole. As it destroys all political, religious and spiritual structures, alienation is the root of modern man's illnesses, as identified by Marx (Fromm 1989, p. 72). The emphasis here on the forces governing his/her life and objectification brings to mind powerlessness, one of the dimensions of alienation. In another work, Fromm, while describing the experience of alienation, says that the alienated individual is a person who has no control over his or her own actions and worships these actions and their results. A person in this state does not see himself/herself as the center of his world; he/she becomes increasingly distant from himself/herself and society. The act of production, which he/she uses as a creative power, is no longer at the center of his relationship with the world (Fromm 1990, p. 134). The point distinguishing work of Fromm the study of Marx which emphasizes that the focus of the alienation should not only be on just workers; but also be on individuals from all layers of society. The individual's loss of his/her work, which he/she sees as a creative power, and the loss of the meaningfulness associated with it leads to alienation.

In an attempt to categorize the studies on alienation and clarify the theory, Malvin Seeman (1959) mentions four more basic dimensions of alienation: meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement in addition to the dimension of powerlessness. Powerlessness, as mentioned earlier, describes the individual who, as Marx argued, has no influence as a decision-maker about his or her life. Meaninglessness describes the loss and incompleteness of the system of values that is expected to come into play in the moments when decisions need to be made about life. Isolation is used to describe intellectuals who are culturally and socially isolated. Normlessness, by the way, refers to Durkheim's concept of anomie and refers to the collapse of the norms that regulate social codes. Self estragement in Seeman's work in order to describe the alienation of the individual from his/her own existence and work in line with Fromm (1990, pp. 784–789). While Marx finds the emergence of the individual who is alienated from his own existence, feels isolated from society and lost his/her connection with norms in capitalism, Fromm comes up with a similar evaluation. As mentioned by him, modern man has an artificial freedom. He has been offered a choice among products delivered by forces beyond his power, and tragically he believes that he is consciously making his choice (Fromm 1990, p. 22). There is a point to be noted here. It is not necessary that the relationship patterns that modern or postmodern people establish while being alienated are solely related to the production process.

Individuals who design their identity and self through consumption codes suffer a loss in their essence and become alienated.

Hinshelwood (2000) makes a similar observation, stating that the illusion of choice permeates even the relationship between psychologist and patient. Accordingly, treating the individual as a person with autonomy and constantly emphasizing the freedom allowing preferences in his/her decisions means being unfair to individuals. This order, which seems to be based on preferences, is on the one hand a false consciousness (Hinshelwood 2000, p. 27). When individuals realize that they do not have autonomy as a result of this order built on the legitimately free choices of the postmodern individual, they may encounter the problem of alienation by realizing that their identities are shaped only around passive consumerism.

Rainer Funk, Fromm's assistant, had similar thoughts on the effects of marketing, advertising and consumption on alienation. According to him, in market orientation everything revolves around the strategy of selling and marketing. This order coverts even seemingly disparate concepts such as goods, services, works of art or human personality into similar things just composed of images. Consequently, the real desires and search for meaning of people would be pushed into the background. Such pursuits are seen as obstacles to the harmony, flexibility and "cool" fitting into all roles that postmodernity demands. As a result, people become alienated from their own powers (Funk 2013, p. 135). This naturally causes people to lose the connection with their lives and society. Again, as stated by Funk (2013), in the alienation created by marketing, there is no room for meaningful relationships and bonds with oneself and others. Only superficial relationships with products that are demandable for the good of the market are allowed. This relationship is far from being a symbiotic relationship and manifests as a one-sided indulgence (Funk 2013, p. 136)

Studies have also shown that this superficialized form of relationship in the consumer society leads to depression. Hari (2019) reveals that a total of 34 studies conducted in many different geographies and countries around the world have demonstrated that individuals who only focus on consumption, achievement and act only in line with materialistic goals have much higher levels of anxiety (Hari 2019, p. 120). These studies, which reveal that the path to a satisfying and successful life in the search for meaning couldn't' be found through capitalism and consumption are meaningful in terms of showing that individuals who experience alienation cannot get rid of it through consumerism. The next section will try to explain the activity of running and its relationship with alienation and consumption.

Running and Re-alienation

Running and other recreational activities can be considered as an extension of individuals' deep search for meaning and their efforts to take control over their lives. Although the motivations that drive people to run vary from person to person, a study on the subject reveals the pattern between running and the search for meaning. According to Gorichanaz (2016), the research conducted by Hanson

et al. (2015) categorizes the motivations that drive individuals by their running distances. While half marathon runners are mainly motivated by health and weight-related reasons, marathon runners aim to achieve their goals and ultra marathon runners aim to make their lives meaningful. Therefore, it can be reconciled with Heidegger's principle that a meaningful life should only be shaped in an authentic way and must be outside the box of what others call life (Gorichanaz 2016, p. 366). When considered in this context, it is possible to consider running as an activity that makes life meaningful and an appropriate tool for detract individual from the negative consequences of alienation by getting rid of the feeling of powerlessness.

Although it does not focus on running, a study on outdoor activities, which are sports practiced with similar motivations, claims that these activities can be considered as an effort to reconnect with nature for individuals who are overwhelmed and alienated from their daily and boring lives. It states that running can be used for purposes such as returning to nature and feeling nature in a sense within seemingly meaningless lives. Nevertheless, sportive activities that set out with this purpose, when it comes to outdoor activities, are commercialized as a result of elements such as the presentation of equipment as an indispensable element by advertisements and media, marketing activities emphasizing the brand rather than functionality etc. (Cater and Dash 2013, pp. 15–17). As a result of the fetishization of equipment, these sports could cause individuals who strive to return to nature and get rid of the feeling of alienation to enter a cycle of alienation again. The introduction of the commercialized relations into the field of sports means the re-emergence of alienation.

Again, a study conducted in the field of sports came to similar conclusions when considered in this context. The fetishization of equipment is not the only dimension of the industrialization of sports. Another point that needs to be addressed and considered in this direction is the presence of sponsors. When sponsors start to offer financial support to support a group or an athlete, points such as the health or happiness of the athlete become secondary and the financial interests of the sponsor come to the fore (Ozdemir 2018, p. 384). Even an activity that athletes intend to carry out as an amateur can become commercial when the sponsorship relationship is involved. Even if an athlete who is conscious about alienation can avoid the fetishization process in terms of equipment, he/she can enter into a spiral again when he/she is included in the group with which he/she is connected to sponsorship relations.

As long as commodity fetishism and commercialized relations continue to persist, it seems unlikely that sport, or more specifically running, can be seen as a way out. In his study questioning whether this culture can be eradicated through individual effort and on a personal scale, Sadler (1977) focused on the relationship between creative endeavor and sport. He argued that such creative endeavors, especially those that allow one to rediscover oneself in nature and achieve inner freedom, such as running, can be used to escape the sharp consequences of alienation. Being performance-oriented, focused on the outcome and achievement rather than the process, can hinder this creative endeavor and prevent it from functioning as an antidote to alienation (Sadler 1977, pp. 88–91). Following a

similar path, this study aims to reveal the impact of external factors such as performance anxiety, commodity fetishism and commercialization on an activity such as running, which has the potential to liberate and return to nature. Through running, the possibility of finding an individual way out of alienation, which is an inevitable consequence of capitalist society, will be tried to be explored.

Methodology

In order to examine the role of running as a recreational activity to get away from the experience of alienation and the potential of running culture to reproduce the experience of alienation in consumer culture, semi-structured in-depth interview method was preferred. It is possible to define this method as follows; it is to obtain detailed information by asking deep and qualified questions related to the subject in order to obtain the interviewee's opinions on the subject (Aziz 2011, p. 86). The model preferred during the organization of the questions of the interviews was "semi-structured interviews". In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has predetermined questions, but may choose to reveal different dimensions of the subject by asking extra questions where necessary (Altunışık et al. 2010, p. 84). In order to gain insights from the experiences of runners in Istanbul through this method, 33 runners were interviewed through snowball sampling. As can be seen in Table 1, the participants have different demographic characteristics and all of them are actively involved in running activities.

Interviews were conducted via online and face-to-face. Audio recordings were made for each face-to-face interview and video recordings were made for each online interview. Approximately 36 minutes were allocated per participant. The semi-structured questions posed to the participants are basically categorized under three main headings: (i) descriptive data about the participant, (ii) the contribution of the running experience to their psychological well-being, and (iii) the experience of re-alienation.

The interview records were transcribed and the answers given according to the coding chart were analyzed. As presented in Table 2, the experience of re-alienation within the framework of the coding chart was examined within the framework of three basic behavioral decisions of alienation (retreatism, compliance, and active involvement) and five basic reasons for alienation (powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement).

Table 1. *Characteristics of Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Income Level	Education Level	Interview Medium	Interview Duration (Min)	Running Experience (Years)	Weekly Running Load (km)	Running Crew Experience (Years)	Accomplished Race Distance	Desired Race Distance
1	29	M	Mid	Bachelor	Face-to-face	43	3	35	2	Half Marathon	Marathon
2	36	M	Mid	PhD	Face-to-face	37	7	100	4	Marathon	Marathon
3	42	F	High	Masters	Face-to-face	73	5	75	4	Marathon	Ultramarathon
4	33	F	Low	Highschool	Online Meeting	33	9	30	8	10K	Marathon
5	35	M	Low	Bachelor	Face-to-face	42	5	80	4	Marathon	Ultramarathon
6	38	M	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	32	5	80	4	Marathon	Ultramarathon
7	37	F	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	27	4	45	4	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
8	34	F	Low	Masters	Online Meeting	45	6	50	6	Marathon	Ultramarathon
9	23	F	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	32	12	25	2	10K	Ultramarathon
10	32	F	Mid	PhD	Face-to-face	62	6	35	6	Half Marathon	Marathon
11	35	F	Mid	Bachelor	Face-to-face	32	8	50	8	Marathon	Ultramarathon
12	39	M	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	43	11	35	3	Half Marathon	Marathon
13	28	M	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	28	3	80	2	Marathon	Ultramarathon
14	32	F	Low	Bachelor	Face-to-face	31	3	25	3	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
15	34	F	Mid	Bachelor	Online Meeting	27	8	20	2	Half Marathon	Marathon
16	26	F	Mid	Bachelor	Online Meeting	34	3	40	3	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
17	44	M	Mid	Highschool	Online Meeting	39	6	50	6	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
18	37	M	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	29	3	60	3	Marathon	Ultramarathon
19	28	F	Mid	Bachelor	Face-to-face	32	2	50	2	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
20	29	F	Mid	Bachelor	Online Meeting	44	5	25	5	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
21	29	F	Low	Bachelor	Online Meeting	32	3	30	2	Half Marathon	Marathon
22	27	F	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	28	4	25	3	Half Marathon	Marathon
23	26	M	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	45	6	20	6	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
24	32	F	High	Bachelor	Face-to-face	34	6	35	6	Half Marathon	Marathon
25	34	F	Mid	Bachelor	Online Meeting	31	7	25	6	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
26	29	M	High	Bachelor	Online Meeting	29	7	45	5	Marathon	Marathon
27	39	F	Mid	Masters	Online Meeting	37	9	35	9	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
28	37	F	Mid	Bachelor	Face-to-face	28	5	30	4	Half Marathon	Marathon
29	33	M	High	Masters	Online Meeting	47	4	50	3	Marathon	Ultramarathon
30	43	F	Mid	Bachelor	Online Meeting	42	5	30	4	Half Marathon	Marathon
31	28	F	Mid	PhD	Face-to-face	26	9	30	5	Half Marathon	Ultramarathon
32	46	M	Mid	Masters	Online Meeting	32	9	50	5	Marathon	Ultramarathon
33	44	M	High	Masters	Online Meeting	28	16	40	4	Marathon	Ultramarathon

Table 2. *Research Coding*

Code Categories	Codes
Participant Demographics	Age
	Gender
	Income Level
	Education Level
On Running Activity	Running Experience (Years)
	Weekly Running Load (Km)
	Running club experience (Years)
	Running Motivations
	Fitness (Weight control, losing weight, performance improvement, etc.)
	Escapism
	Socialization
	Entertainment
	Running Goals and Desired Accomplishments
Running and Psychological Well-Being	Bonding with
	Body
	Nature
	Society
	Meaning
	Norms
Realienation Experience	Realienation Sources
	Economic Factors
	Performance Anxiety
	Peer-pressure
	Power relations in Running Clubs
	Alienation Experiences
	Powerlessness
	Meaninglessness
	Normlessness
	Isolation
	Self-estrangement
	Post-alienation
	Negative Outcomes
	Retreatism
	Compliance
	Positive Outcomes
	Active Involvement

Findings

The study on the re-alienation experience of runners was analyzed in three main finding clusters. Under the title of participants and running experience, the participants' running history, purpose and goals were shared. Under the heading of running and psychological well-being, the contributions of running to the ties that runners establish with themselves, nature and their environment in terms of access to a sense of autonomy through the sport of running are presented by the experiences of the participants. Patterns of re-alienation within the running culture are included under the title of re-alienation experience.

Running Experience Motivations and Contributions to Psychological Well-Being

Each of the participants is an active runner and all runners aim to run marathon or ultramarathon distances strongly as their ultimate goal. When the meaning that the participants attributed to running and their running goals were analyzed, it was seen that various motivation sources were effective together. Participants engage in running to both escape from the burdens of daily life, relieve stress, or seek an escape experience, and to maintain or improve their physical bodies; additionally, they also build social relationships. Based on the answers of the participants, it can be said that running increases psychological resilience and thus supports psychological well-being by establishing connections with one's own body, meaning, nature, society and values, or by repairing or strengthening existing connections.

Most of the participants find running meditative. Participant 28 emphasizes that "*Running is a sport that increases mental endurance as well as physical endurance.*" Similarly, Participant 15 emphasizes the meditative role of running by saying "*I see running as a means of mental exercise as well as physical, I think it teaches patience, staying calm, not getting angry and staying in the moment while physically testing yourself.*" Running is an activity that contributes both physically, socially and psychologically for the participants. Most of the participants reported that they managed their various experiences of alienation through running. Participant 13 emphasizes the importance of running for repairing past disconnections and achieving or maintaining an autonomous life with the following words: "*After I quit my old life and smoking, I started running to help me ... I can say that it is one of the best choices I have made in my life. I try to see it as something indispensable at the same time, especially since it is a habit that I consciously established and a part of a lifestyle. I enjoy running a lot, no doubt, but I care more about maintaining a lifestyle as if I am always running ... I think that running has a very educational aspect that can make people ask themselves questions if they want to see it and I find it very meditative.*". In a similar vein, Participant 2 said "*When I started running, I used to motivate myself by saying -keep your head up-, I consider running as a kind of resistance tool by associating the effort I put into running with daily life.*". Participant 2 stated that he had a history of obesity and instrumentalized running to combat obesity: "*Thanks to running, I live away from obesity. It keeps my weight in a certain range. As of now, I am in the normal weight range, I am happy with my body. During my obesity period, there was almost a distance between me and my body, now I am at peace with myself.*". According to his responds Participant 2 moved away from alienation from his own body through running. As much as it is for weight control, running is also functional for discovering the limits of one's body and increasing endurance. Participant 14 summarizes the impact of running on physical her own physical development with these words: "*At first I focused on running to maintain my weight, but over time, as running became more commonplace, it turned into seeing my own limits. As running became more commonplace, I felt stronger and more resilient, the more I push my physical limits, the better I get to know my body and I almost surpass myself*".

The act of running creates a hormonal surge in the body and creates a positive affect called *runner's high* (Boecker et al. 2008, p. 2523). A significant number of the participants also referred to this and saw running as, in the words of Participant 9, "*the simplest and easiest way to be happy*". When this positive affective potential is combined with the experience of escape, running becomes a functional tool for participants to gather themselves, to take a break from problems and to find themselves. Participant 29 says, "*I run away from the things I have problems with, and as I run away, at some point the meaning of the problems becomes lighter.*" and adds, "*On the one hand, I run away from the things I have problems with; besides, I learn not to worry too much about the things I have problems with by running.*". Participant 29 states that especially the troubles in his work life easily take over his daily life before running; he emphasizes that running offers stress management and psychological resilience in addition to the experience of escape. Participant 18, who builds a semantic bridge between the challenges in running and the challenges in life, says: "I match the challenges in everyday life with the challenges I face in running. Just as I overcome challenges in running, I try to approach everyday challenges in a similar way." When Participant 18 was asked for an example, he replied: "*For example, when I am gaining distance, I need to be calm and patient, I equate overcoming distance with solving a problem in my mind, and I tell myself that I can only resolve the problem if I maintain my calmness.*". Participants both create new connections through running in their mind and find meaning again in issues they had previously experienced disconnection with just as Participant 12 states "*When I was young, I used to love playing games in the street and doing sports, then school, work, physical activity became meaningless, but soon after I gave running a chance, I fell into a childish love [for sports]*".

Participants also stated that trail running is a refreshing way to escape from the concretization and highly populated and unplanned urbanization in Istanbul. Participant 7 said, "*I love trail running. I feel like a free animal in the forest, it makes me forget the chaos of Istanbul and I find peace.*" Participant 13 said, "*I go for a run in the forest every chance I get to get away from the city and the identity of a city person... The forest is good for you, it both makes you feel free and remind your place.*" Participant 6 said, "*Running reminds you of your humanity.*" and he adds, "*It reminds you that you have limits, that you are fragile, that you are an animal in nature. In the monotony of city life, we can forget our limits, I think running makes us remember of these limits.*". Participant 6 expresses his belief that not only running in the forest but also the whole running experience reminds one's relationship with nature and increases the awareness of being human.

All participants have experienced running groups. 13 participants started running by directly joining a running group and continue to run with running groups. Among these participants, Participant 27, who has been experiencing running groups for the longest time, described running with groups and the role of these groups in her life by saying, "*Thanks to the running group, I first learned to run, and then I placed running at the center of my life with the relationships I built there. We don't just run, we almost live together*". These participants emphasized that they were able to run in a much more sustainable way by running together.

Aral and Nicolaides (2017, p. 1) analyzed data from Strava, a popular app among endurance athletes, and found that runners who run together run longer and for longer distances. Participant 7 supports the finding of Aral and Nicolaides (2017) by stating "*Thanks to the relationships I have established in my running group, I run with someone from the group every time I fall into a gap and we both motivate each other and overcome distances together.*" Participant 6 also stated in a similar direction, "*The desire to socialize is actually an important factor in my running experience. I have good friendships that I have made through running. I really enjoy going on an adventure with these friends, chatting while running and spending time afterwards. Running with friends is more fun and satisfying than running by yourself*". Running groups enable participants to find themselves with the sense of belonging, social approval and acceptance they offer. Participant 2 said, "*The experience of being a team is really satisfying. You overcome difficulties together, you laugh together, you feel sad together. When running groups create this state of togetherness, the satisfaction they get really refreshes one's self-love, self-esteem and self-confidence*". Running groups that bring together people with different backgrounds, different tastes and different dreams around the sport of running can also be effective in repairing the disconnects in social values. Participant 24 said, "*In running groups, I made friends with people I would not normally communicate with. My prejudices on various issues were broken. We live in a very polarized society, I could not tolerate those who were against my point of view, but after listening to the different opinions of my friends in the running group, I started to be more tolerant ... My opinions have not changed, I still have the same political position, but I am more tolerant to listen to the argument of the other side.*" and stated that she became more resistant to social conflict through the relationships he established around running.

Experience of Re-Alienation

Participants may encounter re-alienation experience as a result of fetishized attitudes and false consciousness tendencies in the process, as well as positive effects on their psychological well-being with various motivation sources for running. While examining the experience of re-alienation, we first tried to identify the sources that triggered this experience, the affective tendencies in this experience and the attitude change afterwards. Basically, economic inadequacies, performance anxiety, social pressures and power relations within the running group were found to lead participants to re-alienate. Each of these experiences was a combination of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. As a result, the participants made a positive or negative attempt. Recognizing re-alienation, assessing the situation and focusing on correcting or eliminating the source of alienation was called a positive intervention. Similarly, remaining in the process of alienation and not being able to achieve inner peace by compromising oneself was considered as a negative intervention category.

Economic inadequacies appear as a source of alienation frequently mentioned by the participants. Especially when the economic climate in Turkey is taken into consideration, participants with high incomes as well as those with middle and low

incomes stated that economic bottlenecks are challenging for runners. Participant 19, who thinks that "*running seems like a low-cost sport to most people but the opposite is true*" stated: "*If you are going to do it once in forty years, the cost is low, but if you run regularly and especially if you take it seriously, the costs are high. Race shoes, clothes, race registration fees, transportation and accommodation costs add up to a very serious budget. It is not possible for everyone to afford it*". Emphasizing that the financial burden tires people mentally, Participant 19 adds, "*For myself, I got tired due to the financial burden and I reduced the number of races I participated in. Since I don't compete often, I reduced my training load a little bit and automatically the financial burden decreased. Otherwise, I would have quit running, which I find meaningful, altogether.*" Similarly, Participant 6 said "*There are more invisible costs of running than visible ones. I wish one shoe was enough as everyone thinks. When you go over 2000 kilometers a year, several pairs of shoes are inevitable. Your friends around you go to races and you want to go too. When you get caught up in costs and don't go, you feel left behind. Sometimes you get into debt and take out loans. This time you are crushed under the burden of debt. In this way, the whole value of the run can start to fade away.*". Participant 23 turned a similar situation into a positive initiative. He expresses how he started running coaching in order to overcome the financial burden as follows: "*I run serious distances, I participate in many races. As an amateur, it is not possible for me to keep up with all of these financially. I was already providing training support to my relatives, writing running programs and following their performances. When the costs became too high, I started to do it for anyone who wanted to. It is not a huge source of income, but it is still enough for me to continue running, which I love very much*".

Financial burden seems to be a common source of stress among amateurs who practice running as if they were professionals. When this source of stress is combined with the fetishization of running, equipment or races, alienation is inevitably experienced. Participant 2 clearly expressed that runners tend to spend in order to polish their self-presentation with these words: "*I actually spend money in order to show myself, to say that I am different. For example, I buy a different color of a piece of equipment I already have because it looks stylish. Or I choose a big fancy race as my target race.*".

Bauman (2023, p. 24) explains the situation of exaggeration in order to shout out one's subjecthood in the chaotic social order we live in with the concept of subject fetishism. At some point, the transformation of self-presentation into excessive and subject fetishism prepares the ground for alienation for the participants. When Participant 2 was asked whether he felt any discomfort from these purchasing decisions, he said: "*Of course, it is disturbing. I spend on things I don't need when I could spend on more meaningful things. My budget is not unlimited, after all, I feel like a fool when I spend just to look cool.*" When Participant 2 was asked what he did in order not to continue spending in this direction, he replied, "*I try to make more consistent purchases, but I cannot claim that I have succeeded. I just have a budget limit in my mind, I try not to exceed it.*". In order to alleviate the financial burden of running, runners or running groups can establish partnerships with brands. Brands require runners to use and promote their

products as an extension of their marketing communication activities; in return, they provide runners with financial gain, equipment assistance or fundings for races. Participant 23 expresses that the financial burden on him has been eased thanks to the support of sponsors with these words: "*With brand collaborations, my equipment cost has been zeroed, I feel lighter with the economic burden lifted off me.*" but adds "*On the other hand, brand collaborations make me see running as a business. I get away from work and daily life troubles with running, but I spend a serious amount of time for the continuity of brand collaborations. I feel like I am working a double shift and sometimes it is tiring*". Like Participant 23, Participant 8 also stated that brand collaborations can sometimes turn into a source of anxiety by saying "*I provide economic support through sponsorships, but on the other hand, I think that I tire myself extra for the continuity of the sponsorship ... Sometimes I feel like I need to train even more, produce more content, run more races, and reach more recognition in order for the sponsorship to continue or for the conditions to improve further, and when you get caught up in such thoughts, stress builds up and people get tired.*"

Performance anxiety stands out as a source of stress that all runners experience in one way or another. When the meaning attributed to running is exaggerated, alienation can be experienced in different dimensions. Participant 21 stated that she routinely suffered from performance anxiety before the race and said, "*I have been stressed and stolen sleep a lot, as if I was not the one who did all those trainings, saw those distances, those speeds.*" She also stated that anxiety caused self-estrangement at some point. Participant 33 said, "*I get nervous before races or important key training sessions. I lock myself at home early the night before so that nothing wrong happens. I guess I think I should be alone so that I don't make a mistake that will affect the run. ... From time to time, I think that I overdo this sport that I do for fun and become lonely and miss out on life when I overdo it like this.*" and associated performance anxiety with social isolation. Participant 23, on the other hand, stated that he can get very nervous on race mornings and hurt the people he loves, this state is alien to him and he said, "*I get so nervous that sometimes I lose control and then I am surprised at myself.*".

Another source of re-alienation among the participants was identified as social pressure. These social pressures stem from both the participants' non-running or sedentary environments and the relationships within the running group or power relations within the group. Referring to the marathon training period, Participant 8, who had run a marathon once, said: "*I used to do the key training on Saturdays, I could not go out on Friday evenings because these trainings were too challenging for me, and on Saturdays I was trying to rest because I was extremely tired. Normally I would spend Friday and Saturday evenings with my friends, I was really tired of constantly rejecting my environment for almost three months for training. No one openly reproached me, but I had the feeling that I was sacrificing my friendships for what I was doing to be good for myself.*" Participant 28 said, "*I had arguments with my wife from time to time because of the central role of running in my life. It started to feel like I was spending more time with my runner friends than with my family, and I had a serious tension that my relationship would be turned upside down. Since my family is more prioritized than anything else, I*

ultimately preferred to put running and performance in the second plan. I adjust my time according to my family, if they need me, I don't run, I was worried about this at first, but now I don't mind it because my mind is at ease."

As can be seen in these two examples, the possibility of damaging or breaking the relationships that the participants have established with their social circles can cause stress on the individual. Another source of social stress stems from the communication dynamics within running groups. Participants mentioned that the micro power relations within running groups negatively affected them. Participant 2 tried to summarize the stress caused by micro power conflicts in running groups with these words: "*We do run to get away from the stress of daily life and to enjoy it, running groups put socialization into the equation and can increase the satisfaction many times over. When things like sponsorships and branding come into play, our priority shifts away from supporting each other and enjoying ourselves. When the first priority of those in charge of the running group is to make money, your priority as a group member is to enjoy yourself, which creates conflict. When this conflict is not managed properly, relationships break down as a result. As a result, there are breaks from the group and joy is replaced by sadness*". Participant 16 supported Participant 2 by saying "*Sometimes the captains of running groups can miss the difference between demand and request. He tends to see the group member as his employee. As a result, we come to running groups to escape from work life. This conflict really tires people out and puts them off running.*"

Conclusion

Recreational activities, or in the case of this study, running, can be evaluated as a search for meaning in life and an escape from alienation. In order for this experience to be sustained and not to be degraded, it is necessary to be able to show an individual resistance against the commercialized sports culture, in other words, to take a rebellious stance. Whether it is possible to get away from the experience of alienation, which is frequently questioned in studies dealing with the phenomenon of consumer culture and alienation together, was also tested in this research.

For this purpose, a semi-structured in-depth interview study conducted with 33 runners yielded various insights on the experience of re-alienation. First of all, it was found that runners instrumentalize running in order to repair or create new bonds with themselves, nature, the place where they live, others, meaning and values. Running is used for stress management and escape from stress, helping runners to achieve a sense of autonomy. Although running contributes positively to psychological well-being, the various commodity fetishes that the runner develops within the consumer culture in which he/she lives and the weakened social bonds that are mediated by these fetishes can lead to the re-emergence of the experience of alienation.

The false consciousness practices learned within the mass culture we live in cause runners to both fetishize their own subjects and produce various fetishes

within the subculture of running. Running equipment, races, running performances and running groups can become fetishized and the runner may over-value them both economically, socially and psychologically. As a result of this exaggerated valuation, even though the runner tries to use running for psychological well-being, at some point, running with its fetishized dimension can turn into a new source of psychological stress. In the face of this re-alienation experience, the runner can either move away from alienation by redesigning the creative endeavor or making a positive attempt to cope with these fetishes, or they can choose to remain alienated and have to take a negative position.

The fact that the psychological evaluation of various traumas experienced by the runners could not be analyzed in depth should be considered as a limitation of the study. It would be meaningful as future research to examine the effect of traumas on the experience of alienation in relation with running through a detailed clinical study.

As a result of the study, it is possible to say that the experience of alienation is suppressed by running instead of eliminating alienation altogether or creating an escape space for the person. Since the person will continue to fetishize both his/her subject and various objects as long as he/she does not realize himself/herself and his/her reality within the social structure, the escape experience created by running inevitably leads to re-alienation at some point.

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