

# Cossacks, Holy Bread, Running Shorts and Energy Gels, the Race for Religion in Modern Societies

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between religion and sports. The aim of this research project was to discover whether long distance could be viewed as a form of religion. A qualitative research method was implemented, and interviews were conducted to gain an insight into the experiences of long distance runners and to understand how their involvement with long distance running may have an influence on other aspects of their lives. Thematic Analysis was employed to analyse the resulting data. What emerged through the analysis of the findings suggested that long distance running works to promote social cohesion, a shared set of beliefs, good moral conduct and positive social action. The subjective nature of spirituality and its relationship with ones faith was also discussed.

## Introduction

Religion and sport are two institutions which have helped to shape the social landscape for many people across the world. Similarities between religion and sport emerge out of an equal quest for perfection in mind, body and spirit. Durkheim's functionalist perspective on religion classified four functions of religion as being disciplinary, cohesive, vitalizing, and euphoric social forces. That is, religious rituals prepare men for social life by imposing self-discipline and a certain measure of asceticism. Religious ceremonies bring people together and thus serve to reaffirm their common bonds and to reinforce social solidarity, while Max Weber main concern was to explore how a set of beliefs about the world and how an adherence to an ascetic form of Protestantism led people towards a particular way of thinking about their work, social values and social action.

The aim of this study is to explore whether participation in long distance running can provide participants with the functions of society such as set out by Durkheim & Weber. In doing this, the study will examine the experiences of long distance runners and will try to understand if long distance running can be classified as a form or religion.



## Methodology

A qualitative research method was adopted for this study. Six semi structured interviews were carried out to collect data.

Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants using a HTC Phone. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. In order to ensure confidentiality the interviewee were given pseudonyms

The participants consisted of 4 male and 2 female long distance runners The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met the required criteria.

The most suitable method of analysis for the chosen area is thematic analysis; hence a qualitative data led thematic analysis method was adopted. QSR Nvivo 10 was used to sort, code and analyse themes.

## Results

### Discipline, work ethic, & the everyday

Each participant identified an association between their long distance running and their beliefs and value which had an influence in their private, social, and professional lives.

### Rituals, symbols and ceremony strengthens group solidarity

Each participant engaged in ritualistic behaviours and placed emotional attachment on symbols, and each found great sense of community in attending sporting events

### Spirituality & the use of Prayer

None of the participants prayed, each displayed evidence that running provided a space for reflection, alleviated stress, and helped provide support in times of adversity.

### Psychological Health

Each of the participants here promoting the benefits of running for their mental health

## Discussion

The participants presented as being strong in both mind and body, focused, determined and resolute in their actions. Throughout the study, the research has provided examples of strengthened unity, self discipline, and a shared sense of beliefs, meanings and morals.

## References

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