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The Natural

An Autoethnography of a Masculinized Body in Sport

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Stories about individual's lives in relation to sport, and the body have intrigued me. This is due in part to my significant involvement in sport throughout my life and its central role in shaping my masculine identity. I have been particularly interested in autoethnographies as a means through which such stories are conveyed. It is the intense personal meaning that has captivated me most. I often contemplated the capacity to tell my story of a life so heavily invested in sport. The following article is an autoethnography of my body involved in elite level sport. I use a life historical approach to articulate the way in which my body became the focus of my existence within sport and how this impacted my masculine identity. This is a story about my life, and my body in sport. I invite the reader to share my story in the desire that it will elicit a similar response to those engendered in me when I am engaged with a meaningful story.

Keywords: *Autoethnography; masculinity; sports*

The Disciplined Body

I look over at the clock, 2.05 a.m. Will the night ever end? Bring on the morning. The burning in my stomach is excruciating. It feels like, I would imagine, a branding iron might feel on the hide of an animal, only this time it is under the skin, deep inside my gut. Food is the only source of respite for me. However, such is the relationship I am having with food at the moment that the time is not nearly close enough to eat. My body must remain at 60 kg because this is my race weight. This is the weight at which my body is supposed to be at its optimum performance level, or so I have internally pledged. After years of religious body governance including food restriction, obsessive training regimes, and self-medicating anti-inflammatory drugs, my body is suffering. I have yet to see a medical practitioner. However, my understanding of physiological processes through my physical education degree provides me

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with enough knowledge to fear that I have a stomach ulcer. The problem for me at this point in my life is that if my fears are confirmed I will be told to change my life-style, the routine that I have established, and the life in which I feel most comfortable. Change is problematic for me at this point in time. I am an endurance athlete, an Ironman triathlete. The sport has provided me a new masculine identity and sense of self. I am loath to relinquish all that I have gained in the past several years. To compete in an Ironman event is perceived as being somewhat "superhuman" to the uninitiated. To compete in the Hawaii Ironman one is truly gifted, or so it is believed. I like feeling gifted. I like feeling superior to others, such is my arrogance with respect to my body. I know that very few people have the willpower and discipline that I do. I know that very few people will be waking at 4.30 a.m. to begin a training session like I do seven days a week. In my mind, I am up training bettering myself, toughening my body, and strengthening my resolve while everyone sleeps. I like it this way; or so I am indoctrinated to believe.

The History of My Body in Sport

I was a big child. Never fat, I was told. The term "solid" was most used by family members when describing my pre-adolescent physique. After all, "he was ten and a half pounds born . . . poor mother, had to have a caesarean." I struggled to wear the fashion of the time, Levis jeans, due to my large thighs. Fortunately, I was gifted at the highly masculinized sports of Australian Rules football and cricket. I would always be the first player chosen and invariably captained these teams such was my talent, and my size. Sport offered me a way of expressing my identity. My excellence in masculinized sports provided me with social and peer acceptance. For most of the time, I forgot about my body. It was a vehicle for expressing my masculine identity but was never consciously analyzed in terms of its social inscription. I grew very quickly and dominated sports with my superior eye-hand coordination, strength, and muscularity over smaller less coordinated boys struggling to come to terms with their gangly arms and legs as puberty was emerging. As a consequence, my masculine identity created through sports was positive, given its somatic compliance (Connell 1990) with what a large masculinized body should be able to achieve in sports. However, a problem for me emerged once these boys, originally far inferior to me, eventually caught up, and then surpassed in height, strength, and muscularity. All that was left was a solid young male who could no longer dominate the sporting arena in the same manner as before. Therefore, my body in terms of its somatic compliance, as Connell (1990) has suggested, was at odds with the social definition thereby creating "trouble" (p. 89).

As I stand on the football field that I once completely dominated, I now feel like a foreigner not knowing my role where I am supposed to fit in. Where once I roamed the entire field given free licence by my coaches to attain as many possessions as

possible, I am now in a defined position clearly delineated by boundaries set up within the structures of the game. Not only do I feel like a foreigner to the ground but also to the game itself. Sport had always been an uncomplicated pleasure for me and now this sport was a chore. It was one that I was beginning to detest as a consequence of my physique. No longer was I providing the physical presence with my body to assert authority on the field. I felt demeaned and humiliated.

Equally gifted in both Australian Rules football and cricket I chose cricket as the sport to pursue on a long-term basis. It was my father, perceiving my increasing levels of intimidation on the football field, who promised to fully support my total sporting concentration on cricket. From an early age, I was regarded as having immense potential as a batsman. I was selected in numerous representative sides and chosen for special elite training squads supervised by former test cricketers. I enjoyed cricket as a boy both due to the nature of the sporting experience although probably more through the outcomes of success and domination. As a spectator, it remains a passion. However, by the time I was 21 years and never having reached the heights expected of me, I was prepared to give the game away in search of a sport that satisfied my body-based desires. A broken nose and rhinoplasty, following a misguided pull shot gave me the opportunity to walk away from the sport with my dignity intact. It provided me with a legitimate reason to quit and gave others, such as team mates, peers, and family a valid explanation that required no further discussion. Physical injuries are visible and the emotional anguish associated with them can be easily attributable. To state that I simply did not want to play prior to the physical injury would have brought on counseling from a variety of sources. A severely broken nose including major surgery with an additional plaster cast made it a visually compelling case to reassess my cricketing future.

Noteworthy is that a primary concern at this pivotal decision-making period was that of my father and our vested interest in the sport of cricket to our relationship. It had been part of our lives in terms of framing our “positional” identity. That is, his position as a father and mentor, and me as a son requiring nurturing and guidance. While my father was never a cricketer, given his childhood bout of rheumatic fever severely affecting his heart, and would later die as a result, cricket enabled us to share a common bond. Despite me playing at a level only my father could dream of himself, it was he who I always sought guidance such was the esteem in which I held him and his opinions. The following is a direct excerpt from my PhD thesis (Drummond 1997), which I am glad that he was able to read prior to dying several years later.

Sport had always been an uncomplicated pleasure for me, particularly during my childhood. Outstanding in most sports attempted, I was afforded the liberty of choosing the sports I wanted to pursue through adolescence and into adulthood. My parents provided immense support throughout my sporting youth and became involved themselves in the teams with which I played, but never appeared overbearing. I was

grateful to them as much as they were proud of me, but it was my father I most wanted to impress. In under age football matches he was the only person I acknowledged in the clubrooms before running out on to the ground, and his praise and critical comments were the only person's I cared for on completion of the game. At cricket matches we sat together prior to me going in to bat, and I would be back next to him on being dismissed regardless of the score made. Despite my intrinsic sporting motivation, my father was my greatest inspiration.

Despite struggling with the internalized tensions associated with dissociating from a sport that had been so meaningful in the construction of my own masculine identity as a boy and adolescent male, as well as the relationship forged with my father, there was a feeling as if I had released a burden. I no longer had to be the boy who was "going to be." I was now a man making decisions for myself about my future and my body became a major part of that decision-making process.

Finally, I feel free of the constrictions of organized, institutionalized team sports. In a sense, I feel liberated and entirely free to express myself through a new form of physical activity. Importantly, physical activity has been a means by which I expressed myself as a boy developing into a man. This has been the case my entire life. I now feel that I have complete control over who I am as an individual. I feel like I have created a new beginning. I am excited and yet I am intimidated. I am no longer a boy developing into a man. I am a man with evolving needs and desires in terms of my body and my masculine identity. I know that sport and physical activity will be a part of that manhood. However, I am confused. I think I know the type of sports and physical activity in which I want to engage. Interestingly, they are sports I have never actively pursued. I know that I must be involved in an individual body-based sport. That is, something that will allow me to train by myself on a daily basis. I am tired of the rigors of team sports. I know I want to challenge my body, and I know I want bodily change. I am tired of my body aesthetics. I want to be able to pursue a sport that will allow me to legitimately train my body excessively, and I want this training to change its physiological processes. However, importantly, I also want to change the external appearance of my body to reflect the intense commitment to this new physical pursuit. My relationship with my body is taking on a new meaning. It is one that will change my life forever.

The "Natural" Runner

Distance running was one of the sports I had consciously decided upon as being an appropriate sport to change my physical and body identity. However, it was triathlon that was going to change me as a man and impact on my masculine identity. I had a preconceived notion that this emerging sport was going to reconceptualize me as a man and redefine who I was. Despite my newly found autonomy, there remained a

need to find like-minded individuals to share sporting experiences and learn from others. Therefore, I sought out running clubs to learn the “art” of running. I was still too intimidated to enter the worlds of swimming and cycling and would remain this way for a number of years. Running, it seemed, was a natural expression of one’s physicality. For me, it appeared to be an easy field of entry into the emerging sport of triathlon.

A group of men, and some women, routinely stretching and chatting prior to a ritualistic evening training run, surround me. A variety of body shapes and sizes emerge from underneath training jackets and tracksuits warding off the chilly evening air. Noteworthy for me is the thinnest men congregate at the front of the pack appearing most eager to begin, constantly looking at their watches as the sun fades and streetlights take over. Several men wander over to me and introduce themselves. Immediately they begin the runners’ interrogation by asking me my best times and “what I do for 10k,” all in the name of maintaining a subcultural hierarchy. The problem for me is that I have never done a 10k road race and simply run for fun. This will change. I mutter something back to them along the lines of “not very quick” to seem humble if I do happen to be as quick as them, or honest if it happens that I am not. We are about to set off for a leisurely 12-km training run though city streets. I have positioned myself several rows back from the front. This will change. I soon find that my running ability is comparable to most of the men. I feel pleased that my isolated running in the months prior has positioned me well in terms of fitness and physical capacity. I side up to an obviously seasoned runner. He is short, small framed, emaciated in appearance with an unusual high-pitched voice. I seem drawn to him. His first conversation with me is a question. “How long have you been running”? Upon responding with a guarded “not long,” he seems impressed and tells me I am a “natural.” I feel proud. I immediately feel my move from traditional masculinized sports of football and cricket to that of endurance sport is vindicated. However, he continues. “If you want to be any good you’re really going to have to lose a few kilos.” This is a defining moment in my life. While I try and come to terms with his original comment of being a “natural” tempered with that of having to “lose a few kilos,” I immediately begin thinking of ways to lose body weight. Soon this aspect of my running will take over from training and I will no longer be a “natural.”

The Transition

Cricket and football were now a distant memory and simply made up a part of my personal history. They no longer affected my masculine identity. I now sought other physical pursuits to carry out this function. I still finding it intriguing that at a point in my life in which I was undertaking studies within the highly masculinized domain of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) that I required further masculine

validation from an alternative source. Possibly, the PETE environment intensified the need by virtue of the many highly skilled sportsmen undertaking the course and who were performing at the elite level in their sporting endeavors. This highly competitive sporting, social and academic domain (arguably in that order of importance) placed significant emphasis on sporting success within the subcultural hierarchy among my PETE peers. While I was originally accepted among these peers for my cricketing endeavors, there was a greater challenge for me to be accepted for my new pursuit. This transitional period was one fraught with confusion and anguish as the gains being made, for a hasty acceptance, were being made slowly within the context of elite sport. Upon reflection, I can now see that my focus in life was unidirectional and subsequently unhealthy. This was impossible to ascertain at the time due to the artificial importance I had placed on the notion of “being” an elite triathlete.

I feel tired, excruciatingly lethargic. The twenty-five stairs that I negotiate every morning from the University car park have become their own mini training session unto themselves. I watch, almost in envy, as other students bounce up and down on their way to lectures, tutorials, practicals, and lab sessions. The lethargy in my quadriceps, gluteals, and calves make it difficult to comprehend anything beyond reaching the top, let alone any physical activity practicals in which I must participate to fulfill the requirements of the course or, more importantly, the hill ride that I have planned for my “extended” lunch, thereby exacerbating the wretchedness of my body. The extensive training regime and clear lack of food is starting to weigh heavily on my day-to-day functioning. However, the sports-related performance results are impressive despite low energy levels and more impressive are the changes to my physique. Visibly and distinguishably, I am becoming an endurance athlete. The more training I perform and the stricter I become on my dietary regime, the more people are telling me how much weight I am losing. This displays evidence of bodily control and is something that is essential in an elite endurance athlete’s life, or so I have read in the popular culture triathlon magazines. I reach the top of the stairs and walk over to my peers mingling outside the auditorium prior to the physiology lecture. I am too weary to talk and too washed out to laugh and disillusioned with my immediate surroundings. Ironically it is the training and dietary restraint that is creating this disenchantment and yet it is luring me away to perpetuate the problem. I want to be elsewhere, I want to be training and yet I find difficulty walking from one end of the campus to the other. This is not important, I know that once I start training the chemicals in my body will take over and I will be “normal” once more. It is interesting that normalcy is now viewed in terms of training. I begin to wonder how natural all of this is. However, I do not question it for long. By questioning, I am undermining my central focus on “being” an elite level triathlete. The problem at this stage is I am far from elite. This will change, as will numerous aspects of my physical, emotional, and social body in my quest to attain this goal.

The Physical Metamorphosis

I look in the mirror with monotonous regularity and can see the emergent triathlete. I stand on the scales at the end of each day following my final training session, as the scales will determine how much I am allowed to eat, all in the name of 60 kilograms. I am intelligent enough to know that what I am doing to my body is injurious and yet I have little ability to cease. There is something bigger that must first be achieved, or so I was leading myself to believe. My body is constantly in pain. My joints continually ache. I have been treated for Iliotibial band syndrome, hip bursitis, shin splints, chondromalacia patella, and anal haematomas. I have lost every toenail, and they regularly bleed. I am only 22 years of age and have been competing in triathlon for just two years. However, I have completed an Ironman race and qualified for the Hawaii Ironman World Championship. Everything I do to my body can now be justified and legitimised in some way. I now have a legitimate reason for becoming a vegetarian. I can now train at any time of the day or night due to the necessity of "building miles under the legs." I now have the opportunity to make a compelling case for my body being the central focus of my life. As a consequence, I cannot work full-time. This would be compromising my commitment. In order To do justice to my personal pledge, I must provide my body with the best chance to perform at its optimum. Imagine if only I fully understood the notion of the mind-body dualism I supposedly learned in my sport sociology class. Maybe I missed that lecture when I was out cycling in the hills during my extended lunch.

Triathlon, and hence my body, had taken over my life. Upon rising in the morning, my body was the first thing I would think about. I would monitor it the entire day in terms of its performance, its weight, its aesthetics, and its feel. It was evident that while being a successful triathlete was important to me in terms of my masculine and self-identity, the sport itself had become a conduit for change in terms of my physical and emotional body. This is not what my involvement in the sport had originally set out to do. The sport, the subculture, and the members of the subculture compound the problem and make it difficult to not be a part of its intensely critical self-focused and yet self-adulatory world in which ones body is closely scrutinized on both a personal and a subcultural level.

The sport of triathlon during this period was a somewhat fledgling sport attempting to find its position within the context of more broader mainstream sports, despite the vast numbers of competitors it was experiencing in events throughout the Western world. Just as the sport was defining itself, arguably, so too were its competitors. The men involved tended not to begin as triathletes. The sport was too new. Therefore, men, such as myself, and who had attained relative success, came in from others sports. As the sport quickly flourished, the meaning of masculinity within this largely masculinized sport was "hyperm masculinized." Given that the most grueling

of all events was termed the *Hawaii Ironman*, clearly delineated in the early years that this was a “man’s event.” The mythology associated with the event grew, so too did the media hype that depicted men grimacing, staggering, and crawling to the finish line. Therefore, pushing one’s body to its point of exhaustion was upheld as a masculinized act within the context of this sport. Interestingly, the bodies on display within media did not represent the archetypal muscular male ideal. Hence, the sub-cultural context of a lean, vascular, and almost emaciated male body that would be continually endorsed and reinforced by the media and by peers represented its own masculinized ideal. Both of these sources of subcultural archetypes would prove to play a significant part in my own body-based issues during my time in triathlon.

The Body as a Machine

The analogy of the body as a machine has been widely used and accepted within a sport sociological and philosophical context (Drummond 1997; Messner 1992). It has been identified by exercise physiologists that to have a complete understanding of the sporting body and its capabilities, it is essential to have an awareness of one’s physical capacity particularly in terms of VO_2 max, heart rates, glucose levels, lactate levels, energy expenditure, lung function, and so on. It is this instrumental rationality that has the potential to affect heavily on one’s logical thought processes where the body in training is concerned. By placing majority emphasis upon a measuring device to determine one’s physical state is arguably to dehumanize the process. That is, it takes the onus off the individual to conceptualize feelings associated with the body by allowing a technological device to decide the body’s fate at the particular time.

My body is meant to be a machine. I know that machine-like bodies are those, which are afforded the privileges of success through winning. I know this because I have read it in triathlon magazines. I know this because I have listened to elite level coaches talk. I know this because my peers talk about it as if it were the subcultural dogma of triathlon. Accordingly I monitor everything that enters my body and everything that my body expends. Energy in versus energy out. I certainly remember this lecture. On a good day, energy in equals energy out. Therefore, ultimately the body will lose fat, or so I believe. I do not count the basal energy requirements that are needed for everyday existence. On a “normal” day, this machine must carry out a multitude of functions. It wakes at 4.30 a.m. and is driving to the swimming pool for a 5 a.m. start time. It warms up with 500 meters and gradually works itself in by midway through the session. The clock is the monitor. The body must keep up or else it fails. Fortunately, this session it does not fail. However, it has in the past and it has suffered for it from its keeper. By 7.30 a.m., the machine is back home and refueling for its next task. It has been assigned a 60-km bike ride through rolling hills and will begin in two hours. This provides enough time to assess its working order and

monitor its energy and fluid levels. Out on the road, the machine must warm up. However, not too much as there is a time schedule that must be adhered to as well as a heart rate to be maintained. Yes, this machine has a heart but its job is not relational to health, its role is associated with functional capacity. That is, to make the machine move faster and more efficiently. Today, the machine is struggling over the hills upon which the monitor reflects. The downhill provide some respite. However, this is not a good day. An overhaul is certainly required. A complete energy assessment will be performed along with dietary analysis and caloric scrutiny. This can only be carried out at the end of the day for there is still one more function this machine must undertake. Upon arriving back home, later than anticipated, the machine attempts to recharge itself for an hour before embarking on its next chore. Time passes too quickly. The machine is at breaking point, but only physically. Machines do not have emotions and they lack feeling. Therefore, they must do their assigned tasks. The machine is up and running, literally. A brisk 10-km run to end the day before a brief workout with weights. Fortunately, this machine is a "running machine" as it is regularly identified. The ease at which this machine glides over the ground, even while faltering at the end of the day, is intriguing. It is as if this machine is built to run. The heart rate monitor certainly reflects this assumption. Maybe it is "natural"?

The Body in Isolation

My body within the context of sport had been the central focus of my identity throughout life. The passage from highly masculinized team sports to the introspective individual endurance sport of triathlon had been a turbulent one in terms of the psychological, emotional, and physical implications on my body. During the most intense training and racing period, I felt immortal with respect to what my body could do. However, tempered throughout this period were feelings of loneliness and isolation as I struggled to find others who understood my world, apart from those already within the triathlon subculture. This in turn ultimately heightened the loneliness as it became obvious that others too within my social circle were struggling with such issues. Upon reflection, a concerning aspect was being involved in a sport that required a degree of social reclusiveness in which to be successful. A compounding problem was the fact that there were few close individuals who understood my bodily plight, and similarly there was no one with which I could share the success.

It is 5 a.m. It is another balmy, overcast morning on the "Big Island" of Hawaii. The floodlights illuminate the swim to bike transition area. After months of intensive training, I am less than two hours away from beginning the Hawaii Ironman World Championship. I feel ill with nervousness. I am alone. I watch as other athletes prepare, making sure their tires are pumped up to the optimal tire pressure. They chat,

they joke with another. I am alone. I walk around the transition area and down to the start line. There is now an hour to go before the cannon is shot to start the race. I see a few familiar triathlon faces from back home. A few discursive glances, nods of acknowledgement but essentially, still alone. Race time is now minutes away. I am amongst 1500 competitors walking down to the start line. I feel very alone. The cannon is fired. The race begins. This will be the loneliest day of my life, and yet I have done it before, and I will do it several times again. I emerge from the 3.8-km swim section satisfied and yet daunted with what lay ahead of me. I am quickly changed both in terms of my clothing and mind-set to begin the bike leg. With triathletes all around me, I do not feel camaraderie. I somehow feel foreign to this whole physical experience and yet this is my life. This is what I do. Half way through the 180-km bike section, the packs of triathletes are no longer as tightly bunched. As emotions wane for many so too does their physicality. I now start to feel comfortable. Maybe I enjoy the isolation? The day is starting to heat up. There are predictions of 40°C. Upon reaching the turnaround point at the top of a gradual incline, I begin my journey back home. I am flying. Folklore claims that it is imperative to reach the turnaround point before the trade winds blow. It is better to have these winds at one's tail than in one's face. Psychologically, I have overcome a barrier. I look down at my speedometer that now indicates I am cycling over 50 km per hour. This will soon change. Something is happening to my body. My legs are becoming heavy and I am starting to feel nauseas. Once again my technocratic rationality implores me to consult with the speedometer to confirm that my body is slowing down. I look ahead at the vast expanse of highway cutting through the rich black lava fields and I now see very few triathletes. I am alone. I can feel tears welling up in my eyes and heaviness in my throat. Something is happening to my body. I am trying not to cry. Men do not cry. I have 20 km until I begin running. I enjoy running. I am a natural runner. I can see the transition. Thousands of people line the street cheering and shouting words of encouragement. I detest this. Why cheer? I have not finished. Out on the run, a full marathon, I know I have at least three hours of running in front of me. I must finish this section in less than three-and-a-half hours to break the ten-hour barrier. This seems to be the delineation between an average triathlete and one that is clearly good. I am not average. I must beat this barrier. I run this section almost entirely alone. I meet up with another Australian competitor. We provide words of encouragement and he runs on. I feel demeaned and embarrassed as I am rarely outrun. I am a natural runner. I look at my watch at regular intervals. My numerical calculations after more than nine-and-a-half hours of exercise are not very accurate. I begin to panic that I will not finish in time, the time that I have established as my benchmark for success. I am now resigned to finishing beyond ten hours. I feel humiliated. I turn the corner and notice the masses of people lining the streets once more. I hear the announcer screaming words of encouragement to competitors as they cross the line. I see the finishing line and I still have four minutes to spare. Clearly, my mathematics is somewhat skewed. I cross the line in nine hours

fifty-six minutes and twenty-one seconds, easily within the top 10 percent of the field. My chosen sport and subsequent lifestyle have been vindicated. I am a good triathlete and have raced the Hawaii Ironman World Championship. I stand at the end with my finisher's medallion around my neck along with hundreds of other triathletes from around the world. I feel proud. I feel dispirited. I am alone.

The Journey Ahead

My aching body was regressing under the constant physiological demands placed upon it by the volume of work that it was subjected to on a continual and sustained basis. My psyche was also suffering from the illogical demands that had been arbitrarily decided as being the benchmarks of success. The 60-kg body, the sub ten hours Ironman, the sub two-hour forty-minute marathon. The Hawaii Ironman had appeased some of my emotional concerns and vindicated the physiological pain. However, an emotional void lay ahead that seemingly only another Ironman race could fill. Like a gambler, I needed one more "hit." When in reality, a successful "hit" meant another attempt at Hawaii. And so the cycle would continue.

It is 9 months since I stood alone in crowd of triathletes in preparation for the Hawaii Ironman. I am once again in a crowd and once again alone. This time it is Japan. I have heard the analogy 'a moth drawn to flame.' Surely I am not the moth? Though I suspect the flame, I am attracted to will dim upon the completion of this race. Again I see several other Australian teammates at the start line. We bid each well, though I don't care for their welfare as much as they don't care for mine. This is a narcissistic, self-indulgent sport for many who participate. The gun goes off in familiar fashion while bodies' reel and flail to selfishly find enough open water to manoeuvre ones arms in a fashion that resembles a swimming stroke. I am 30 minutes into the swim and begin to question my existence in this sport that I am beginning to loathe. As I exit the water excitement wells inside. I now know why I do this sport. I am good at this sport. I enter the bike leg well positioned. My body feels fresh. The ritualistic 'carbo loading party' the day before is working. The technocratic training taper employed in the 4 weeks leading up to the race is working. The plan is unfolding to script, yet I am still unclear why I am here. I have travelled over to a country I know little about with men I barely know and do not particularly enjoy their company. I have no one supporting me. Several hours out on the bike course I am alone, just as I was at the start, this time both literally and metaphorically. The physical stress of the long ride is taking its toll. Maybe I have not "listened to my body." I have stomach cramps while pain wracks my body. There is only a marathon to complete now. I have done it before. I am experienced. It will not be a problem. As I dismount the bike, I feel as though knives are twisting in my quadriceps. The stomach cramps have me doubled over such that I resemble a decrepit old man. This is not how an elite athlete should perform. I feel my body shutting down. I have

experienced this feeling before. My body is demanding me to assess this situation. Though my head is not interpreting the signs. I begin a slow shuffle. I feel empty, as I simply have 'nothing' inside. This body feels foreign, though it is beginning to work through the pain. I remember that I am a 'natural' runner. My emotions periodically fluctuate from exhilaration to despair as the chemicals in my body impact my senses. This has been a long enduring run leg, and Pepsi has been my friend. I thank caffeine and sugar as the finish line looms. Several of the other athletes sidle up and provide encouragement to help finish the race. This was not about finishing for me. I have done that before. This was about racing. Clearly I have not done that here. In triathlon terms, I have 'blown up.' My body has failed me. Though in reality I have failed it.

My eyes open to a familiar surrounding. The crisp texture of hospital bed linen is reminiscent to that of hospital bed linen in Australia where I have woken up in a similar circumstance after my first Ironman Australia event. Though this time I cannot understand the language of the medical staff. I gesture that I want to be released immediately. I do not want to miss the Ironman awards ceremony where I will be bestowed with another Hawaii Ironman qualifying position. I must be there to accept, otherwise it will be forfeited, or so I am lead to believe. At the ceremony, I am both embarrassed for my failed masculine body falling into a coma and having to be urgently admitted to hospital. Yet, I am revered by some for pushing this same masculinised body beyond its physical capabilities. I am further revered for gaining another World Championship qualifying position. As I sit amongst people I refer to as friends, in reality I do not know them well. I realise I am still alone and begin to question this whole 'charade.' I have heard that old cliché that life is a journey and that we each travel different roads to eventually get to where we need to go. At this point right now, I know this is not my life and my journey must take another path. I am unsure where I want to go.

An Emerging New Life

I often reflect on a comment that a colleague made to me when I originally embarked on writing this autoethnographic account of my body in sport, stating that “men, such as us, who have invested heavily in sport to create a masculine identity find it hard to give up.” That was certainly the case for me in those transitional years from a high level-performing athlete to what I regarded as a “regular” man partaking in what I perceived to be mundane everyday tasks. Being an endurance athlete set me apart from other men. It placed me on a higher hierarchical scale as a consequence of what my body could do and my capacity to push it to its physical capacity. The problem with such an ideology, however, is the somatic limitations that exist. While I consistently invested in sport as a means through which to construct my masculinity, I would argue that I had been intensely cerebral about my body and its

role in the masculinization process from early in my childhood. This analytical perspective weaved its way throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, sometimes being more prominent than others and certainly in situational circumstances where my body was required to be on “display.”

The cerebral eventually took over from the corporeal during those triathlon years as my body began to falter and I struggled in coming to terms with the charade of having to *be* and *act* in a particular way to create a masculine identity. I found myself seeking answers to questions that I was posing to myself as was training and racing. I began a Masters Degree in Health and Physical Education with a particular sociocultural focus on the questions for which I was seeking clarity. The interesting part for me was that I began this degree on a part-time basis and through distance learning, given my heavy training schedule. However, I quickly found myself reducing four-hour bike-riding sessions down to two-hours and 4-km swim sessions to 2 km to spend more time reading, researching, and writing. My life as an academic was emerging. I eventually went and lived on campus at the University at which I was studying to immerse myself in the broader academic culture. While still training and physically and emotionally controlled to a degree, I was surrounded by academics that inspired and challenged me. I felt an excitement that I had rarely felt, other than that which sport had provided. It seemed I had found an alternative means through which I could develop and maintain a masculine identity. The realization at that point in my life was stark. The transition was beginning. The problem though is that when we have invested such a significant amount of time and energy into a way of “being,” change becomes an incredibly difficult challenge. On many occasions, I found that engaging in masculinized training sessions with other triathletes or racing to win was a necessary element to immediately enhance a masculine identity that I perceived was flagging and in need of “repair.” The immediacy of this masculinized “fix” was apparent. It certainly challenged my resolve of the academic path being the most appropriate route to travel. I even competed in another international Ironman event in the year after completing my PhD thesis. The old cliché “two steps forward, one step back” sometimes comes to mind when I think back to those transitional years.

The Story and its Meaning

As academics we often find difficulty in ending the articles we write. We postulate over whether we have said enough to make the case compelling. We wonder whether the reviewers will “get it” and how our peers will ultimately accept the article when it is published. This article is no different. However, in this instance, the article is a story of my body and a life consumed in sport. It is far more intimate than I imagined I could have written in my early years of academia. The combination of time, experience, and the internal need to change convention around writing about

masculinities and the body has led me to this point. It seems after 14 years involved in masculinities research and inquiring into the lives of other males I am attempting to seek clarity around my own body and masculine identity. I would argue that, in my early years of academia, when I first began research around masculinities and sports, I was indeed seeking clarity. However, I argued that I was seeking out research evidence to answer questions associated with the way in which masculinity is socially constructed in elite level sports. I dabbled in a little autoethnography at the beginning of my PhD thesis but quickly identified this as merely “setting the scene.” I sensed that I was required to “stick to convention” and what Chamberlain (2000) has aptly termed methodolatry in qualitative research.

I am glad that a considerable amount of time has passed to eventually complete this story. While I still engage in daily physical activity, whether it is running or cycling or swimming, I am no longer a *triathlete*. Had I written this story during my formative academic years, it would have been significantly different. Indeed, I do not think I would have had the capacity to be honest, given my closeness to the sport, its subculture, and its inherent meaning to my masculine identity. Like many other retiring athletes (Messner 1992), it took me a significant amount of time to identify that I was not an athlete, despite having a tenured academic position and a PhD. The level of investment in sport as a means through which I could construct my masculine identity limited other possible avenues. Even my PhD thesis provided closeness to the triathlon subculture and ultimately allowed me to legitimately engage with it on a regular basis.

Time and distance away from the sport and its subculture have provided immense clarity surrounding my body and my masculine identity. In that time away from the sport, I have become a husband, a father of two children, and an academic with clear direction for myself personally and my profession generally. However, I would argue that the single most determining factor in reaffirming the changing construction of self and subsequent, masculine identity was that of becoming a father. It was now quite obvious to me that in my time as a triathlete, I was selfish, narcissistic, and somatically driven. These are qualities, which many argue are required in elite level athletes. As a father, I became responsible to others. I was responsible in assisting this new child in all the developmental facets and also to be available to this child simply to nurture. I also became mindful of my role as a husband to care for my wife in a way that was new to me as well as provide her with personal space, given her foreignness with being a mother for the first time. Importantly, these were not thrust upon me unconsciously. I planned on becoming an academic and actively sought ways in which to achieve this. My wife and I planned on having children. We discussed my role as an inclusive, and not an absent, father. It seems that the time in my life had emerged to define myself, and my masculine identity, through a different lens. We now have two children, and my role as a father constantly changes. I suspect that these changes together with the roles and responsibilities in my academic domain will bring new ways of perceiving myself and my masculinity. Additionally,

the ageing process, as I near my mid-forties, periodically emphasizes its presence, particularly after many years of endurance sport. As I have identified elsewhere (Drummond 2003), the ageing process in men can make us perceive the vulnerabilities of our functional body rather than its aesthetics. Significantly I am becoming acutely aware that we have less control over the ageing process than we are led to believe in our youth.

While this is a story of my path through early adulthood as a man seeking clarity in his life, it is also emphasizes the way in which sports can come to provide meaning to masculine identity in men. Endurance sport provided a sense of identity and membership to a subculture that I identified with. However, I would argue that throughout periods of early adulthood I began to conceive of a life that involved something more than sport and more than an identity created through my body in terms of its sporting performance and aesthetics. Indeed, this part of my life has led to me to the point that I am now as an academic researching and writing in masculinities. On occasions, my body groans, creaks, and aches through the constant physical activity that it has had to endure, and still endures, though on a far limited scale in comparison. Yet, it reminds me of the story that is within me and makes up part of who I am as a man. We each have a story to tell. This is part of my story.

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