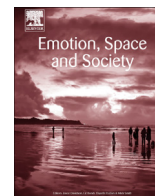


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“Just tape it up for me, ok?”: Masculinities, injury and embodied emotion

Jason Laurendeau*

Department of Sociology, University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Dr. W., Lethbridge, AB, Canada T1K 3M4

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ABSTRACT

In this autoethnography, I consider the emotionality of sustaining and exacerbating an athletic injury. I interrogate youth sport experiences in which coaches and teammates lauded my willingness to play sport with little regard for my physical well-being, and the anxieties, doubts, and frustrations I experienced through the process of ‘recovering’ from my injury. In the process, I forefront my (athletic) identity, and the embodied emotionality of confronting a ‘failing’ body upon which it rest(s)ed. Additionally, I critically interrogate violence as a thread running through practices and discourses of masculinity, situating my researching body at the “intersecting vectors of power, knowledge and identity” (Giardina and Newman, 2011a: 524).

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1. Cast of (main) characters¹

Boys

(‘Wanna be’) athletes, deeply – and unreflexively – pursuing an imagined and imaginary masculine ideal

Men

(‘Has been’) athletes experiencing bodily “betrayal” (see Sparkes, 2012), ambivalently trying – and often failing – to extract themselves from the pursuit of an imagined and imaginary masculine ideal

I have two intentions in mind with the pluralization of “boy” and “man” here.² On one hand, I intend to suggest that I am interrogating the gender projects of others (if not as centrally as my own) in the narratives that follow. On the other, it is meant to reflect the idea that identity is neither stable nor fixed. The boy I was at age 17, for example, is not the same boy I was at 13, though he struggled with and against some common issues. The point is not simply that there is a multiplicity of masculinities, either in a social setting or across a lifespan;

*rather, the point is that how boys and men embody masculinity, and endeavour (or don’t) to accrue ‘masculine capital’ (de Visser and McDonnell, 2013) has important implications for men’s relationships with themselves and their bodies, as well as with other social actors and **their** bodies (Smith, 2013). Put differently, masculinities are inextricably and (intra/inter)corporeally relational (Drummond, 2010; Schippers, 2007).*

2. “There is no ghost so difficult to lay as the ghost of an injury”³

May, 2004

I lie on the floor, and Julie,⁴ my great friend and physiotherapist, prepares to administer the “Gokavi Transverse Technique,” a treatment she has performed on me numerous times since *the injury*. The procedure involves inserting a needle-like instrument into a tight muscle; the muscle contracts in response, and when it relaxes, it is longer than before the treatment. With the warm, afternoon sun pouring in through the kitchen windows, I lie very still, conscious of the trickle of sweat running down my armpit. I tense in anticipation, holding my breath. And then, a bolt of

* Tel.: +1 403 329 2717.

E-mail address: jason.laurendeau@uleth.ca.¹ I gratefully borrow this device from Adams (2006).

² As elsewhere (Laurendeau, 2011), readers might think of these italicized sections as analytic memos written at various points of this project. The aim, following authors like Ellis (2011), Markula (2012), Diversi and Henhawk (2012), and Newman (2013), is to employ polyvocality and *show* readers the process of working on/with/through ideas *throughout* the process of writing an autoethnographic project.

³ This quote comes from Scottish poet and essayist Alexander Smith (see http://thinkexist.com/quotation/there_is_no_ghost_so_difficult_to_lay_as_the/174492.html, accessed March 15, 2013).

⁴ I employ the real names of central characters in these stories, each of whom has consented to their inclusion in this work. I have provided more peripheral characters with pseudonyms.

lightning strikes me, running several inches from the point of insertion.

I see the look on Julie's face, and rewind the track in my head, knowing something went awry. As I replay the last seconds, I see it: As she inserted the 'needle,' I hit her. Not a tap. Not a playful shoulder punch. I hit her. Utterly, totally involuntarily. And hard.

How on earth did I end up (t)here?

3. (Writing) emotion, embodiment, masculinities

Emotions, Williams argues, are "complex, multifaceted human compounds which arise, sociologically speaking, in a variety of sociorelational contexts [and link] larger social structures with the emotional experiences and expressions of embodied individuals" (2001: 1).⁵ Of particular note in this excerpt is the emphasis on *embodied* individuals; as "a thinking, moving, feeling 'complex' – rather than a static, unidimensional 'thing' – emotion is *embodied* through and through" (Williams, 2001: 132, emphasis in original). Kern, for example, highlights the sociological import of considering emotion and embodiment together in order to explore the ways in which bodies, as "corporeal, material entities [are] given meaning within (historically specific) social and spatial contexts" (2012: 30).

More to the point for the current paper, it is not simply that emotions and embodiment are co-constitutive. Rather, our "embodied practices" (Kern, 2012) are undertaken in relation to other bodies and emotions (our own and those of others). Following Walby and his colleagues, I consider emotions "as the experience of *social relations*" (Walby et al., 2012: 4, emphasis in original). Central to my project here, this conceptualization: attends to the articulation of self and social structure; concerns itself with the complexity and layering of emotions; and calls forth the methodological bricoleur who draws on research methods that forefront "emotions in situ as they occur during sequences of interaction" (Walby et al., 2012: 5). This conceptualization highlights how we both experience and become aware of emotion in bodily ways, in the context of (inter)corporeal action in particular social situations (see Francombe, 2013; Hubbard, 2005; Williams, 2001).

Following Ellis (1995: 313), I aim to bring "readers into the emotional complexity" of the experiences I consider in this paper. From this perspective, it is not enough to write about emotion. Rather, "we should study emotions emotionally and feel and care for our selves, participants, readers, and topics of study" (Ellis, 2009: 110). My aim, then, is to construct autoethnographic narratives in which readers can see (and feel) themselves and their own embodied emotions. This is not to romanticize the therapeutic potential of narratives (Smith, 1999). As Sotirin suggests, though, narratives might open up "lines of thought, sensate experiences, and imagination that depart from the narrative–lines of flight that do not converge upon shared passions or pain but that disrupt or disregard ready commonalities and assumed connections" (2010: 10). In so doing, perhaps they become one part of a complex of narrative resources upon which readers might draw as they (re) construct their selves.

In this autoethnography, I focus on emotion and embodiment as made manifest in a variety of intercorporeal moments over more than two decades. Beyond that, though, I interrogate my gender project in the process, exploring masculinities as "*constructed, performed, and read* via complex webs of on-going social

interactions in specific relation to the workings of discourses and associated power relations that are allegorically connected to male bodies" (Pringle and Hickey, 2010: 119, emphasis in original). My aim in undertaking this project is to move my "tacit, sensuous body, its fleshy sinews, its movement and its (in)activity" (Francombe, 2013) into the texts I produce. So what I want to move "out of the shadows" (Giardina and Newman, 2011a: 530) are my own embodied (hyper)masculine performances and the ways in which they might be conceptualized as part of a pursuit of an impossible (and imaginary) ideal (Pringle and Hickey, 2010).

As part of this project, I "reflect on some deep-rooted anxieties that I hold about the injured, impaired, and disabled body" (Sparkes, 2012: 181). Following Newman (2013), my aim in this paper is to use somatic experience as an entry point into broader discussions of hybrid identities and the creation of the self within the confines of powerful (but not all-powerful) discourses (also see Crocket, 2012; Pringle, 2005). I understand identity as fragmented, unstable, and always 'under construction' (see Helstein, 2007; Peers, 2012). So my ableism is one of a number of layers I explore here as I forefront masculinity(ies), emotion and embodiment through a consideration of my "problematic [body] in social space" (Eldridge, 2010).⁶

4. (Embodied) pleasure and pain

May, 2000

Behind the back. White sand. Under the legs. Crystal clear water. Leaping, lunging, lounging, being.

I am spending four weeks in Venezuela with two of my best friends. As our time here winds down, we have a tiny island to ourselves for the day. As Nika relaxes with a novel, Mike and I throw a Frisbee for hours. We are *entirely* in the moment. We take inordinate pleasure in creative moments of play. We play not against each other, but *with* each other in every sense. We celebrate successes – our own and each other's – and disavow the very idea of failure, if only for a few glorious hours.

*****⁷

September, 2003

The summer "ultimate"⁸ season is my first sustained experience with the activity, and I'm getting pretty good.

Today, early in the fall season, we're playing on the most chewed up field I've seen. But I don't care, because I have legs. Everything our handlers launch, I track down. I go long, and Fred finds me. I cut back along the sidelines, and the disc is in the perfect spot; I am in the proverbial 'zone.' In the second half, the opponents' frustration goes into overdrive, as does my competitiveness. I'm defending one of their best players, and as he starts to make his cut, I anticipate where he hopes to meet the disc, and close the gap. As he reaches out, face grimacing with effort, I lunge, and feel the plastic against my fingertips as I knock it down.

"Foul!" he cries, *much* too loudly and certainly for my liking.

"Contest!" I yell, even before I've thought it through.⁹

⁶ I should acknowledge here that I use this phrase in a rather different vein than does Eldridge.

⁷ I employ this device to mark the transition between narratives, whether these narratives take place in very different spatio-historical 'moments' (as is the case here) or simply later the same day.

⁸ For more on the sport of ultimate frisbee, commonly known by practitioners as "ultimate," see Crocket (2012) and Thornton (2004).

⁹ As Crocket (2012) explains, recreational Ultimate is a self-refereed game. A player on whom a foul is called, for example, may accept the call and the consequences (the disc being advanced for the opposing team). Alternatively, he/she may contest the call, returning the disc to the player last in possession of it (essentially forcing a replay).

⁵ In contrast to my earlier autoethnographic writing (Laurendeau, 2011), in this work I draw significantly on the words of other writers in particular sections. I do so, to borrow from the Editor of *Emotion, Space and Society*, in an effort to more explicitly write "with and through other texts," and thus situate this work in conversation with the writings that have shaped this project as it has developed.

“You hit my shoulder, dude!” he protests, a trickle of sweat tracing the outline of his slight scowl.

Talking over the end of his sentence, I retort: “Yeah, the front of your shoulder with the back of mine! I was there first!” I know I’m right (and, more importantly, refuse any alternative to insisting on that ‘rightness’), and don’t let it go. Later, I’ll feel ashamed of this exchange, but right now, I feel robbed of a moment of great defense.

In the dying minutes of the game, the guy who’s been covering me for the last several points, and whom I’ve just ‘schooled,’ yells to his teammates in exasperation: “I can’t fucking cover that guy! He’s too god-damned fast!”

Everything stops. I’m still jogging back to the line, anticipating the next point, but I replay his words, smiling broadly.

It’s 9:15, and I call friends who live nearby for a lift home from the pub where the team had congregated for post-game nachos and beer. As I place my hand on the corner of the table and put weight on my left leg, something feels wrong. Not “can’t put weight on it” wrong, but wrong. I make my way out to the curb, where Julie greets me, her physiotherapy spidey-senses tingling.

“What’s up?” she asks one eyebrow raised. “You’re hobbling a bit.”

“Yeah, I don’t know,” I say, brow furrowed. “Just feeling a bit niggly right now. Weird though – feels like my *bone* is sore. Like right here at the top of my adductors.” I pause, wincing as I put more weight on it. “Yeah, it’s actually like my pubic bone hurts.”

“Shit, Jay, you’ve pulled your groin.” She looks at me intensely, holding my gaze.

“Oh,” I say, shrugging slightly.

“No, not ‘oh,’” says Julie, fixing me with the steely eyes of a therapist. “Groin injuries are notoriously slow to heal and easy to reinjure.”

“Ok,” I say, flopping into the backseat. As I sit, enjoying the warm autumn air flowing through the car, I *should* be replaying the phrase “groin injuries are notoriously slow to heal and easy to reinjure.” But I’m not. Instead, I’m replaying “I can’t fucking cover that guy!”

In this moment, I saw my groin, and the ache therein, as “both part of me and not part of me, as both intimate and alien, as self and other, but one powerful symbol among many of the multiple dualisms and contradictions that I inhabit in relation to my body” (Sparkes, 1996: 468).

5. “That’s what I’m talkin’ about!”

October, 1989

I am one of the smallest players on my high school (gridiron) football team, and rarely touch the ball in games. Perhaps this makes it sound as if I don’t take the game seriously. It shouldn’t. Whether on ‘game day’ or at practice – like today – I give it everything I have.

It’s 4:15, and the receivers and defensive backs have been doing drills for close to an hour. Coach’s pinched lips punctuate his crimson face. “Stop!,” he bellows, rubbing his receding hairline. “Enough god-damned dancing! Those juke moves only work if sometimes, just sometimes, you put your head down and actually HIT someone!!”

My cheeks flush. He’s right, and I’m leading by example. The wrong example, from his perspective.

As my turn approaches, I make a promise to myself.

And to coach. I loathed him, feared him, and yet yearned for his approval.

As Rob approaches me, poised for my ‘move,’ I drop my head and hammer him. As our helmets meet, there is a loud crack, and we both stop dead. No one breathes. I sit on my ass, wondering if it was my helmet or my neck (or Rob’s) that made that sound.

As I stagger over to the sidelines, fumbling to get my balance back, coach’s booming voice breaks the silence: “Now THAT’s what I’m talkin’ about!” He slaps my shoulder like we’re fishing buddies.

This is the “glorification of hard physical contact, in the capacity to both give and take it” that Fitzclarence and Hickey (2001: 129) discuss. As Stoudt (2006) outlines, violence may be “embedded in the social fabric” of social locations, and is always implicated in power relations between individual men and boys. It was certainly part of the fabric of that team. Both the (considerable) power I experienced on that team, as well as the deep shame, were authored in and through acts of violence. As Williams notes, emotion is “both socially responsive and socially efficacious, arising in patterns of structural relations which provide the emotional basis for subsequent actions which reproduce, modify or transform these very structures at some later point in time” (2001, 133, emphasis in original). And in the case of my years in football (and elsewhere), the risk regimes (Laurendeau, 2008; Olstead, 2011) of the activity are the “patterns of structural relations” that most matter (see Young, 1993 for a related discussion of violence in “male sports culture”). By and large, my “subsequent actions” served to reproduce those patterns, even well into adulthood. Only in retrospect am I really starting to work towards challenging these patterns.

June, 1990

You work¹⁰ as a line cook at a restaurant in your late teens. You have made great friends there, several of whom have started playing pick-up football together every week or two. Most are not particularly athletic, and none have played organized football. As football, it’s not great. As a space for the accumulation of “masculine capital” (de Visser and McDonnell, 2013), though, it is fabulous. In this homosocial space, through your physicality, you accrue masculine capital to “construct a masculine identity and defend against threats to this identity due to ‘feminine’ behavior” (de Visser and McDonnell, 2013: 12).

Only one other person (your best friend Mike) is as good an athlete as you in this regular group. As such, you two are not allowed to play on the same team together. When another friend (Ian) shows up, you and Mike seize the opportunity. In warm-ups, you ‘miss’ a tackle or two with Ian, making him look even better than he is. Once you and Mike have been placed on the same team, however, the real fun begins. The real fun involves you two reading each other’s moves, scoring more or less at will, and having a great time doing it. You take much more pleasure in creative experimentation than in being better skilled than the others.

The real fun, though, also includes a moment that is a touchstone of your teenage pursuit of a masculine ideal. The other team kicks the ball, and Mike catches it. You know he has the ‘wheels’ to go all the way, so you jump in to block. Ian bears down on Mike, poised to cut his return short. Mike makes his move, and Ian loses his balance slightly. Your timing is perfect; Ian is teed up for you, and you drop him with everything you have. He flies backward, landing on his ass, looking slightly bewildered. Though you didn’t need to hit him that hard to break Mike loose, it was a legal hit. You pause for a moment, burning this moment into your memory.

“Great block,” Ian says later, not making eye contact.

In this moment, I was ‘doing’ masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987, 2009) through my actions, asserting my masculinity (and

¹⁰ Following Adams (2011), I write this section and a later one in the second person for two reasons. First, I aim to disavow some of my objectionable behaviours. Second, I want to compel readers to ‘see’ themselves in these narratives (though I hope they do so more generally), to recognize their own complicity in some of the processes I consider in these pages.

accumulating masculine capital) **at the expense of** Ian's. Perhaps more importantly, both of us were doing masculinity through what we did not do or say. For my part, I did not ask Ian if he was all right, nor did I apologize for using more force than necessary. Ian, meanwhile, did not complain (we would have called it "whining") about the hit. Any of these actions would have marked us as weak, as "feminine," in a broader youth sport environment in which sexist and homophobic remarks (e.g., "you dropped your purse"; "you're such a homo") were invoked far too easily and too often. In acknowledging the masculine capital I 'earned' in this exchange, Ian simultaneously preserved his own through a demonstration of resilience (Smith, 2013).

August, 1990

Football games have continued throughout the summer. Today, there's a new guy, and he's good. And huge. He is clearly the best player on the field from the moment he steps onto it.

A while into the game, I am zoning in for a tackle. Out of nowhere, the 'new guy' hammers me.

I lie on the ground, unable to move, struggling to catch my breath. My cheeks feel flushed, the surest physical indicator of the shame that consumes me.

Did he have to hit me that hard? Shit! It was a legal hit, but come on!

"Great block," I say later, not making eye contact.

In these moments, it could be argued that my flesh, bones, and muscle, as well as those of the other players, were (re)producing the process Messner describes in his discussion of the production of "soft essentialism" in youth sports: "The hardening of boys teaches them to transform any feelings of hurt, pain or sorrow [and I might add shame] into the more 'appropriately masculine' expressions of contained anger or stoic silence" (2011: 163).

6. "Just tape it up for me, ok?"

July, 1985

Between grades six and seven, I attend my first volleyball camp, a highlight of my childhood. I am not the best hitter (Jamie) or the best server (Jamie), or the best blocker (you guessed it), but I'm not the worst. At the end of the week, we gather around the coaches for a brief ceremony, sweat-stained kneepads hanging loose around our ankles. I hold my breath as they announce the award for "most valuable player" and hand Jamie a trophy. My shoulders slump as I exhale. The coaches aren't done though. They hand out awards for the "best" everything, it seems. As they get to the last award, I stare longingly at the boys [and their toned, bruised, sweaty (able) bodies] around me holding their 'hardware.'

"We've got one more trophy here. This goes to the player who busted his butt all week long, who never quit on a ball, who worked harder than anyone else.... Jason, come on up here." I feel the heat in my face as I replay what I just heard. I focus intently on the floor, not wanting to meet anyone's eyes, yet desperately hoping everyone (hoping Jamie) is paying attention. My "hustle award" is one of just two trophies I will receive in my unremarkable youth athletic career.

On the front of the trophy was engraved, simply, "hustle award."

The etching that matters, though, was not on the trophy itself. The etching that matters was on my psyche and, by extension, my body. It read(s):

You will be rewarded for disregarding personal safety in order to play a game. Some of these rewards (like this trophy) will be tangible. But make no mistake, some will not. Those rewards – the ones that you really want, after all – will come in the form of subtle head-nods, pats of your shoulder, your butt, your head. They will

make the sacrifices worth it. They will tell you that you are becoming a man.

November, 1987

You are in grade eight. You want desperately to fit in, but you are awkward and spectacularly insecure. What you do have going for you, though, is athleticism. Volleyball playoffs are about to begin, and you have established yourself as the starting setter. Last weekend, in one of your many questionable decisions driven by the desire to be part of the "in" crowd, you drank some root beer schnapps, and then headed to the gym to shoot some hoops. Rather predictably, you severely sprained your ankle landing from an off-balance baseline jump-shot. This is how you find yourself here, reflecting on the doctor's words: "You'll need to be on those crutches for six weeks."

It's been four days, and you're sick and tired of lugging the crutches around school with you. Tossing the crutches into your locker, you drag yourself from class to class, angling your foot just so.

Here is your ableism at work. You succumbed to (and simultaneously reproduced) compulsory able-bodiedness; refusing the crutches as a symbol of disability (McRuer, 2010).

At the end of the day, you limp up to practice. Coach pauses when he sees you at the door, appraising your (im)mobility. He hasn't said much about your injury. He certainly hasn't encouraged you to play.

Just as importantly, he hadn't discouraged you from playing. He hadn't told you that your value to the team – or as a boy – was connected to anything other than your bodily (in)capacity.

A few days later, playoffs begin. You sidle up to the coach an hour before game time. He turns his head towards you, the clipboard going slack in his hands as he does so.

"Just tape it up for me, ok?" you venture. Coach sets the clipboard down, so gently that it makes no noise. He squares his shoulders to you, squinting slightly. Looking at the floor, you add: "Tape it tight; I don't want to feel it."

Looking up, you see the muscle in coach's jaw contract and relax, contract and relax. He exhales, slowly, as he reaches for the roll of tape.

Perhaps, like a number of the coaches Messner (2011) considers, my coach was buying into the idea that competitive sport is a 'natural' pursuit for boys in which it is acceptable to harden boys, as it prepares them for later life. Whether he did or not, though, he (re)produced this idea, and the effects of this ideological framework on my bodily tissues.¹¹

7. "Slow to heal and easy to reinjure"

September, 2003

It's a few days after *the injury*, and I'm being good. I've taken it easy for a few days, and I'm not even playing in tonight's game. I'm just here for moral support.

As game time approaches, Fred utters the words I've been fearing (and, if I'm honest, for which I've been hoping): "Looks like we're one short."

I pause, exhaling slowly. "I can play," I say to myself. "I'll take it easy. Julie says I have to be careful with this." A few minutes later, I'm dressed and warming up.

¹¹ One reviewer wondered whether my coach "wasn't risking his professional accreditation, employment etc." with his actions here. In principal, this might be the case. In practice, I, like numerous other student athletes, was repeatedly enabled (if not outright encouraged) to disregard the advice of (para)medical professionals. See Safai (2003) for an insightful discussion of this phenomenon at the collegiate level.

Why did I even have my cleats with me if I wasn't planning on playing? And Julie **did not** say that I have to be careful with this. She said: "Groin injuries are notoriously slow to heal and easy to reinjure."

As the team gathers around Fred to talk about defensive strategy, I say: "Ok, gang. I can't run tonight, so we've got to play a soft zone or something, k?" They nod in agreement.

Did I believe myself at the time? Did they know? Mike knew. He had to know.

We're fifteen minutes into the game, and my groin feels ok. I'm running a bit, but not hard. No sudden accelerations. We're on offense, and Fred – our best handler – has the disc. I see 'the look,' the same look he and I have exchanged a number of times this season, the one that says "you can take him." I slow up for a heartbeat, watching the shoulders of the guy covering me. The instant they relax slightly, I'm off, the disc already en route. I push just hard enough to create the gap I need. I have a shot at the disc, but Fred really laced it. Digging in, I hear the "pop" before I feel it.¹²

At half-time, Shannon approaches me, water bottle in hand: "This is you not running? Dude, you've still got wheels."

Was Shannon's comment a rebuke? Was she giving me heck for running too much? Or was she, in keeping with the dominant 'sport ethic,' complimenting me? Complimenting my speed, but also – and perhaps more importantly – my willingness to put the (basically meaningless) success of the team ahead of my physical well-being? This is one of a number of moments in which, like Drummond (2010: 385), "I am both embarrassed for my failed masculine body [and] revered by some for pushing this same masculinised body beyond its physical capabilities."

My cheeks flush as I feel a pang of shame, knowing that I've behaved badly. But not just shame. I'm injured. Broken. In need of restitution (Sparkes and Smith, 2011). Not whole.

You sure you want to acknowledge that ableist response? As the guest editors noted in their comments on an earlier draft, "disability activists would challenge this idea. To describe being injured (disabled) as 'broken' and 'not whole' is a stereotypical/negative view of the body that functions differently to dominant (able bodied) versions." But that's the point, isn't it? The point is to 'own' my complicity in (re)producing the very systems of alterity I aim to critique.¹³ And hopefully this opens up "lines of flight" (Sotirin, 2010) for readers.

8. The hike

April, 2004

It has been several months since the ultimate season ended. Normally, I would have spent much of the Canadian winter cross-country skiing in the nearby Rocky Mountains. Not this year. This winter, the one time I dared to so much as jog for the bus, I aggravated the injury. So it is with both excitement and trepidation that I head out for a relatively easy hike in the early spring. I have missed the mountains terribly; hiking generally brings me such a sense of peace.

¹² As Julie later explained, I pulled my hamstring because I was compensating for my groin injury. Despite her protests, I continued playing for weeks, injuring and reinjuring myself each game. By the end of the season, I had pulled both hamstrings and both groins.

¹³ This hints at a deeper conversation in critical disability studies about the complexity and political import of theorizing the relationships(s) between the concepts of "disability" and "impairment" (e.g., Hughes and Patterson, 1997; Hughes, 2009).

Today, though, that peace seems just out of my grasp in the opening minutes of the hike. Though the incline is slight, my breath is laboured, and instead of taking in the splendor of my surroundings, I am monitoring, cajoling, admonishing my body. I am begging it to perform in the ways it once did, the way I 'know' it can.

It is supposed to be about the journey, remember? Not the destination.

About a half an hour into the hike, I ease the pack off of my shoulders and let it fall lopsided to the moist earth below. The lump in my throat has caught me by surprise, and I succumb, my shoulders heaving slightly as I sob, lamenting my 'failure.'

In this moment (like in others), my masculine identity is inextricably relational. Often, my masculinity is most clearly constructed in relation to others. What this moment illustrates, though, is that this relationality is also (and perhaps centrally) about the self (Smith, 1999). Here (and elsewhere), I construct and understand my masculinity in relation to my past self, my (imagined) future self. I (mis)remember what this body of mine could do previously, and wield it against myself, not for the only time. It is this moment, more than any other, that instills in me the sense of urgency that leads to the more aggressive treatments described at the outset of the paper. For many months, I will subject myself to painful treatments in an attempt to reconstruct both my body and my sense of self.

9. "Oh, you don't know me very well"

October, 2007

Recently, I paid a certified trainer to construct a workout program for me. Following his advice, my workouts for the last several weeks have consisted of the following types of exercises:

1. Rotator cuff exterior rotation (for a rotator cuff injury)
2. Walking forward/backward lunges [to recover from and prevent a repeat of my groin injury(ies)]
3. Multi-hip abduction/adduction (groin)
4. Bosu kneeling pull-down (for core strength – lack of core strength was a central factor in the groin injury)

In light of these workouts, I feel ready to play basketball with some fellow faculty members. So, today, I find myself warming up, surrounded by other ageing, 'failing' bodies.

After a few warm-up shots, I'm standing behind the baseline with Patrick. I explain to him the history of my injury, and the fact that sudden stops and starts tend to aggravate it.

"So, you'll just be pulling up for jump shots, mostly?," he asks.

"Oh, you don't know me very well," I say, chuckling. "I have two speeds in basketball: Full speed and full stop."

Wow. That's a revealing moment. It's bad enough to try my best to heed Julie's advice to be careful, then get caught up in the moment and push it too hard. But here I am, standing perfectly still, several feet out of bounds, acknowledging that I'm going to accelerate, that I'm going to play my usual (injurious) slashing style. I'm saying – highlighting! – that I can't (won't?) embody a different version of athleticism than the one that has wreaked havoc on my body. And, I'm doing this at 36 years of age. It's not like I'm an impetuous 19 year-old any more.

I try to hold back in the game, constantly (pre-)occupied with thoughts about my groin – whether that's tiredness or an ache I feel – and taking it easy. I feel like a horse that hasn't been let out to run in too long, chomping at my bit. I am frustrated, impatient, forcing myself to play a version of this game I love that simply does not fit.

As Dashper (2013) notes, athletic "injury remains a part of self-concept long after the wounds have healed. Sometimes ... an

experience, feeling, sound or smell, will provoke a memory that brings the injury back within the viewfinder's field of vision.¹⁴

When I get caught up in the game, though, and push – “too hard” – I am totally in the moment. I am in love with the game (again), freed, if only temporarily.

Maybe that ambivalence is productive though. Like some of Pringle and Hickey's respondents, I am unsure, at moments, whether I have “refused [my] previous self or removed [myself] from previous sources of tension” (2010: 132). But perhaps that uncertainty is what helps me to imagine other spaces – and ways of occupying those spaces – that allow me to pursue the pleasures of my sporting practices while embodying a more complex, “soft” masculinity (Pringle and Markula, 2005).

10. Coda

In this paper, I have highlighted embodied emotion in sporting practices, pointing to both the ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ of (inter)corporeal engagements in sporting arenas over almost a quarter of a century. These narratives, however, are not meant (solely) to ‘capture’ or ‘explain’ this phenomenon. Rather, they illustrate that our intercorporeal emotion is a process of bringing (particular) social relations into being. Like Fitzclarence and Hickey, I understand sport “as a contradictory and complex medium for masculinity making” (2001: 118; also see Laurendeau and Adams, 2010), and sporting participants to be active producers of their own subjectivities, constrained, of course, by the systems of meaning in circulation in these configurations. To borrow from Pringle and Markula (2005: 475), my aim in this paper has been to consider how I developed knowledge about myself and my embodied masculinity in and through key sporting experiences spanning almost three decades. This critical reflection represents an “attempt to understand the performance of the self in these moments, the unwritten/written moral codes and sets of values that dominate, and how the self is situated within these moral codes and existing power relations” (Pringle and Hickey, 2010: 134). This is not with the aim, to quote the subject line of a recent email to Mike, for the sake of “immortalizing [his] (and my) misbehaviour.” Rather, the aim is to work towards something better (see Newman, 2013).

My physical ‘deterioration’ was, and to some extent remains, a source of intense frustration and disappointment. Perhaps, though, it also represents an opportunity to contribute to “critical awareness of the complex relationships between [sport] and masculinities while simultaneously promoting circulation of alternative discursive resources that could allow for the (re)storying of lives, social practices, and relations” (Pringle and Markula, 2005: 492). As my bodily tissues repair and reform, I take this opportunity to (re)imagine what my particular version of masculinity might look like, both on “the field of play” and off. Perhaps, in so doing, I can do more than feel ambivalence about my bodily practices, about the violence in which I've engaged, both against my own body, and against the bodies of others.

“Others” include, of course, other athletes against whom I have ‘played’ (aggressively). This, however, is a much too narrow framing. To return to the scene from May, 2004, my violent reaction to the pain of the treatment might be read as a commentary on the relationship between violence and masculinity. Though I continue to understand

¹⁴ Though coming from a very different perspective, Julie echoed this idea. After reading an earlier draft of this paper, she wrote: “... there is much being written on how pain can linger when the tissue damage has ended... signals relating to the injured area, or the mechanism of injury are more likely to be processed as ‘danger’ signals as your brain is overly sensitized to protecting this area. In your language describing your fears and emotions surrounding this injury, I see the potential for your thought processes to be ‘amping up’ pain signals/danger signals from this area...”

this as an utterly involuntary reaction to physical discomfort, this does not mean that it could have happened to anyone. In many sporting (and other) contexts, men are encouraged (even taught) to occupy space and engage in physicality in particular (often violent) ways (Stoudt, 2006). I might speculate, for example, that the “fabric of social relations” Stoudt describes set the conditions of possibility for my involuntary reaction to pain to be a violent one.

As elsewhere (e.g., author, 2011), I have drawn on personal narratives in this analysis, exploring the process of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). I do this both to move my body into my texts, and to (re)assure readers that my ‘findings’ are “thoroughly contaminated” (Giardina and Newman, 2011a: 526). Moreover, I move my body into the text in order to consider my moving body as a site upon and through which power is written: “knowledge about the world is grounded in the experiencing body, and the body itself as the site for the production of knowledge” (Moola and Norman, 2012: 290). If I have done this well, my body thus becomes the locus of interpretation (as well as lived experience and reflection). As I take readers back and forth in time and space(s), I invite them to imagine my body (and how I position it) in relation to others in different ways. In many of the moments I consider here, I am at once positioning my body for moments of physical proficiency (and, sometimes, dominance), and (because of that performance-seeking spatial positioning) also setting my body up for injury and ‘deterioration.’ That is, I make myself vulnerable whilst simultaneously endeavouring to actualize a valued version of embodied masculinity (Young, 1993).¹⁵

As I critically consider my corporeality, I challenge myself to encourage others to do the same, and to (re)imagine alternative corporealities as we (re)construct our (sporting) selves. In other words, I interrogate my body (and embodiment) “as locus of politics and praxis” (Giardina and Newman, 2011b: 37).

I close (without aiming for ‘closure’) with a vignette from the early years of the new century, one in which I am playing squash with my older son, nineteen years of age at the time of writing. The specific date is unimportant, both because similar scenes played out numerous times over these years, and because (I worry that) these various moments work together to produce the process Sparkes describes with respect to his relationship with his own son: “embodied memories connect my flesh to him. In shared movement, in sinews, masculinities crystallise. Him-I-he-me-we-touching trajectories in time and space” (2012, 178).

Matthew is, as they say, cut from the same cloth as am I, at least with respect to a particular (competitive, hypermasculine) sporting embodiment. We are playing hard, though we're at very different skill levels in this particular game. In the middle of a heated rally (the tempo of which he controls), he pushes me very deep to the back of the court. As I chase down the ball, I know I should let it go. I know I'll win the game regardless of the outcome of this point (and that it doesn't matter!).

It doesn't matter? The outcome of this ‘competitive’ event is irrelevant as a moment of competition. As an embodied moment of fatherhood and masculinity, it matters a good deal (see Sparkes, 2012). But what did you feel at the time? You felt a (selfish, short-sighted) competitive urge to... what? To show your young, fit son that his “old man” wasn't so old? Could still “bring it”?

I accelerate, hammering the ball into the back wall, my body to follow shortly thereafter.

Matthew wins the point, makes eye contact, and asks “you ok?” He is genuinely concerned about me, but something else is detectable too. Admiration. Misplaced admiration.

¹⁵ My thanks to Joshua Newman for his insightful articulation of many of these ideas in his comments on an earlier draft.

Perhaps the issue is not what I felt at the time. Perhaps the issue is what I did **not** feel, what I would feel in the same circumstances now, having (re)storied my embodied emotion in and through these stories. In the process of writing, I “learn how pain can turn into promise and new pleasures” (Pelias, 2012: 297). *The emotion I feel now – and that I can (hopefully) conjure in readers – becomes part of the process of moving forward; like Poulos, I believe in the “power of autoethnography to ‘move’ both writers and readers, to shape and transform identities, to build capacity for transcendence” (2012a: 293). This is neither simple nor guaranteed, of course. But if it were either, there would be no need for this work. Nor do I mean to suggest that “narrative” is the only way to work towards something better. But “in and through the acting of writing through my pain, my memory, my life [stories], I find openings to possibility” (Poulos, 2012b: 325). And I hope others do as well. Otherwise, writing would just be another performance.*¹⁶

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