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Storied Bodies in Motion and Stillness: Shifting Meanings of Physical Activity in Women's Life History Narratives

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

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Abstract

Gender is a social determinant of health (SDH) because societal values, expectations, and norms of men and women lead to health disparities. There is a general lack of research on gender as a SDH. What does exist is largely epidemiological; it demonstrates relationships between gender and health, but it does not deconstruct the *nature* of those relationships. Qualitative methodologies, which are underutilized in health promotion, may be a means to an improved understanding of the ways gender and health behaviour are jointly performed.

The purpose of this work is twofold: first, to determine if narrative inquiry is a meaningful and productive approach to study the relationship between femininity and physical activity, and secondly, to examine the relationship between femininity and physical activity within women's life histories. Narrative inquiry was utilized because it allows for the study of both content and form, of lived experiences as they are remembered. Five women between the ages of 30 and 40 participated in two individual semi-structured interviews. Data analysis consisted of a holistic content approach, followed by a categorical-structural and categorical-content analysis. Findings are discussed within a feminist framework.

This dissertation is comprised of five integrated articles. The first explores the feminist underpinnings of performative social science, an umbrella term under which narrative inquiry often resides. The second uses autoethnography to examine my own resistance to dominant exercise discourses for women, while also highlighting the complex nature of theorizing lived experience. The next article is the first of three that report on the aforementioned study. In it, I 'play' with numerous approaches to

employment, introducing the reader to each participant individually and the plot that holds her physical activity life history together. The fourth article presents the shared structure of the women's life histories as well as emergent themes. The last article uses metaphor within a short story to encompass, through performance, the lived realities of my own and my participants' lives.

Findings demonstrate the shifting meaning of physical activity throughout the women's lives from play to sport competition, a means to weight loss, re-embodiment through physical activity, and imagined future roles of motherhood. Emergent themes include *a hierarchy of activities, triangle of exercise, diet, and thinness*, and *The importance of social influencers*. This research has the potential to inform future health promotion initiatives that are grounded in women's lived experiences.

Keywords

Women's physical activity, life history, lived body, narrative inquiry, autoethnography, social determinants of health, gender and the body, health promotion, governmentality, exercise discourses, fiction, metaphor

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CHAPTER ONE

Shifting Meanings in Women's Life Histories of Physical Activity

Introduction

This project stems from my interest in the ways women navigate the social terrain of gendered expectations to experience physical activity. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the relationship between femininity and physical activity in order to better understand gender as a social determinant of health. Only 14% of Canadian women meet the recommended daily amount of physical activity (Colley et al., 2011). Health promotion and fitness discourses often function as neo-liberal rationalities that aim to educate the public regarding the risks of physical inactivity, increasing individual autonomy, and decreasing the state's responsibility for its population (Ayo, 2012). This work represents a step back (or perhaps forward) in order to allow for a concerted approach to listening to women's stories and thereby gain a better understanding of how they experience, think about, remember, and understand physical activity. Before health promoters address gender, and specifically femininity, as a social determinant of health, it makes sense to explore what physical activity actually means to women, where these meanings come from, and how they may or may not reflect broader social discourses on health, fitness, femininity, the body, and what it means to be a woman.

This chapter begins by outlining my own relationship to the topic of this dissertation by situating myself within the field of health promotion. The terms 'physical activity' and 'exercise' are clarified. I provide a literature review, which focuses on the social determinants of health, specifically gender, and research on women's sport and

physical activity that falls into two categories: Foucauldian analysis and phenomenological analysis. Following this review is a reflexive account of my methodological choice of narrative inquiry and my orientation to feminist theory. Lastly, the plan of presentation for this dissertation is offered.

Situating Myself within Health Promotion

We know that our texts have specific locations.

We know that they represent –

whether in some hidden way or openly –

our baggage as individual social scientists.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1058).

I have a vague memory from when I was very young of begging my mother, “Let’s do Mary Hart!” I was referring to the workout video we had on VHS, in which a young Mary Hart would bare her bright teeth for thirty minutes straight, while she bounced aerobically about in her brightly coloured spandex, big hair flying, and only four grapevines left to go. Now three, just two more, last one! Great job, everybody. For me, “Mary Hart” was something fun to do with my mom, and how much I loved to have company doing the thing I always seemed to be doing – jumping around on the carpet like the floor was hot lava. For my mom, I can see now that it was more complicated. Body movement meant many things, conjured many feelings, and represented many contradictions, as it does for me now as well.

For many years of my life, physical activity remained uncomplicated. I was an athlete, participating in everything under the sun or on the court. In university, I ran varsity track and field, and I loved to train and compete. When I retired from competitive

sport, I experienced somewhat of an identity crisis, and being in the thick of writing an autoethnographic master's thesis on the ways gender inequalities from the past continue to be embodied by present day female athletes (McParland, 2011), I was incredibly reflective and critical regarding my own shifting motivations for physical activity. I began to look around me and wonder what made other people want to be physically active. My experience was gendered because I felt pressured by dominant discourses to achieve and maintain, through physical activity, a certain 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' a term I love, created by Laura Mulvey (1975) within cinematic gaze theory.

For the first time in my life, I considered the idea that physical activity might actually be disempowering for women in some instances. To me, this idea was intriguing, especially within the field of health promotion, from which I sometimes contract a sense of oversimplification: *exercise good, sitting bad*. I am not alone in this consideration, as health promotion has been criticized by numerous scholars for its failure to engage with and deconstruct power structures that disenfranchise specific populations from the lifestyle project the field has largely become (Butler-Jones, 1999; Coburn, et al, 2003; Green, 2008; Poland, 2007; Raphael & Bryant, 2002; Raphael, 2008).

With several shifts throughout the last centuries, health promotion has emerged, according to some, as an instrument for a neo-liberalist agenda (Poland, 2007; Raphael, 2008). These shifts are outlined by Monaghan (2011) and include sanitary reform interventions in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the advent of widespread vaccinations in the early 20th century, the redefining of health towards a more robust meaning than simply the absence of illness in the 1970s and 1980s, and a further reorientation towards intersectorial collaboration in recognition of health as a resource, as opposed to an

objective, through the *Ottawa Charter on Health Promotion* (World Health Organization, 1986) in 1986. Changes in the late 20th century demonstrated international leadership through the characterization of health and health promotion:

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy lifestyles to well-being (World Health Organization, 1986).

Canada has failed, however, to implement the framework outlined at the end of the 20th century, and instead health promotion practice in Canada today is often more aligned with the ‘victim-blaming philosophy’ that plagued interventions from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries (Webster & French, 2002).

This lingering philosophy remains cemented in Canadian health promotion due to a combination of the government’s war on the welfare state in the 1990s, an increased role of a growing market through healthcare consumerism, and the influence of the competing population health model that essentially stripped health promotion down to lifestyle education campaigns (Monaghan, 2011). Canada is left with a gap between paradigm and practice – a paradigm built on values of equity and social justice and practices that function as neo-liberal rationalities. Neo-liberalism represents a lifestyle ideology, in which individuals, regardless of their environment and social and economic welfare, are expected to govern their behaviour based on standard expectations of health

(Raphael, 2004a). Dominant discourses that produce these standards decrease the state's economic responsibility for the public's care and turn individuals into health consumers (Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). Monaghan (2011) argues that neo-liberalism has emerged parallel to prevention discourses. Globalization has led to a risk society in which health promoters use risk prevention as a tool of governmentality (Peterson, 1997). Health promotion can be characterized as a form of biopower, disciplinary practices that shape the body politic (Foucault, 1976/1980).

As a student in the field of health promotion, I sometimes feel I'm swimming against the tide. I am drawn to an holistic definition of health that takes into consideration the ways the aforementioned disciplinary practices, which can include physical activity and dieting, that are performed to meet expectations of morality, may be empowering, oppressive, or a mixture of both to a person's emotional well-being, which in turn affects their overall well-being. I think some health promoters have been too simplistic in dealing with the very complex and layered experiences of health behaviours, such as physical activity, and this naiveté has led to a lack of sustained improvement in health outcomes (Poland, 2007). The failure to acknowledge the intricacy of lived experience may be a result of an overrepresentation of "post positivist/epidemiological/quantitative methods" in health promotion research (Poland, 2007, p.8).

This dissertation answers a call for research that goes beyond the "narrow and asocial combination of epidemiology and economics" (Coburn et al., 2003, p.293). Qualitative methodologies provide an avenue to contextualize the personal, social, and political experiences of health and health behaviours in order to align with paradigm values, such as equity and social justice. These values have been put by the wayside in an

under-theorized field that often fails to engage with issues of power and marginalization (Poland, 2007). Critical, anti-oppression perspectives, such as the feminist perspective taken in this dissertation, can add depth and meaning to the construction of health promotion teaching and practices. Throughout this dissertation I engage with issues of ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, role of the researcher, and means of representation in order to explore and draw attention to the possibilities for qualitative health promotion research.

Clarification of Terms

Physical activity is defined by the World Health Organization (2014) as, “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure.” Within daily life, physical activity can be categorized into “occupation, sports, conditioning, household, and other activities” (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, (1985). While sometimes used interchangeably with physical activity, exercise is actually a “subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and purposeful in the sense that the improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is the objective” (WHO, 2014). These definitions for physical activity and exercise will be used throughout this dissertation.

Literature Review

Social determinants of health

In Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ life expectancy is 20 years less than other Australians, despite their low infant mortality rate (Marmot,

2005). Marmot (2005) asks, “Would it be helpful to go into a deprived Australian Aboriginal population and point out that they should really take better care of themselves – that their smoking and obesity were killing them; and if they must drink, please do so in moderation?” (p. 1102). Lifestyle approaches to illness prevention are prevalent in North America. Much of health promotion in Canada is based on neo-liberal practices that aim to educate the population regarding the risks of unhealthy behaviour (Raphael, 2002). Neo-liberal governmentality can be referred to as a “political-cultural economic project,” in which ‘free’ subjects govern themselves based on dominant discourses and social norms (Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). Regarding health promotion, educational campaigns are meant to shift power towards individuals in order for them to choose their own health behaviours, while simultaneously creating a social model of what behaviour is good and right. In this way, neo-liberalism allows the state to govern from a distance by allowing individuals to govern themselves, thereby reducing its economic responsibility for its citizens’ well being. This method of health promotion relies heavily on the taken-for-granted assumption, often drawn upon by researchers, health promoters, and members of the public, that all that is necessary to correct people’s unhealthy behaviour is better education regarding healthier lifestyle choices (Thompson & Kumar, 2011).

According to Raphael (2002), “The majority of heart health initiatives in North America focus on increasing physical activity, promoting healthy eating, and reducing tobacco use” (p.vii). In Canada, the government funded program ParticipACTION reaches out from television screens into the living rooms of regular families and tells them to exercise, be active, have fun, and improve their health. In an effort to reduce childhood obesity by 20% in five years, the Ontario government and Public Health

Ontario created the *Healthy Kids Panel* whose recommendations in “No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy” (2013) are largely education- and social marketing-based. While an admirable program, its recommendations are extremely vague regarding their concepts for “support” and “encouragement” of certain behaviours, such as breast feeding and creating healthy environments. Also, the Panel findings, despite recognizing low income as a significant barrier, give it little attention within the recommendations. In London, Ontario, the Middlesex-London Health Unit’s *In Motion* campaign was designed to “promote and celebrate healthy and active living. Its vision--building Canada’s healthiest community--will be achieved through social marketing/communications, education, and community partnerships” (2013).

Research shows that such social marketing, educational campaigns have small or insignificant effects on physical activity levels (Abioye et al, 2013; Gainforth et al, 2016; Marcus et al, 1998). The hierarchy of effects model, or HOEM, which is used to evaluate mass media campaigns on physical activity, is designed with a chain that links proximal factors to distal outcomes, with success of the campaign becoming exceedingly difficult with movement along the chain towards distal outcomes (Gainforth et al, 2016). For example, in Gainforth et al’s (2016) evaluation of ParticipACTION’s “Think Again” campaign, the proximal factors included parental awareness of the campaign, parental knowledge of physical activity guidelines for children, parental expectations for children’s physical activity levels, parental intentions and support behaviours to improve children’s physical activity levels. The HOEM evaluation suggests small, but significant improvements in each proximal factor. However, these proximal factors did not influence the one distal outcome, increased physical activity in children.

Marcus et al. (1998) reviewed 28 studies of media-based exercise interventions (seven mass-media campaigns initiated at the state or national level and 21 delivered through the community, workplace, or via healthcare). The results indicate that participants displayed a high recall of the message, but they did not change their behaviour significantly. In another meta-analysis, Abioye et al. (2013) revealed that physical activity mass media campaigns could improve walking levels, but may not induce people to meet physical activity requirements. The campaign known as VERB™, focused on those aged nine to 13, did demonstrate a link between proximal factors and distal outcomes with increased understanding of the VERB message positively related to significant behavioural change (Bauman, 2008). This campaign focused on normalizing physical activity through images of tweens participating in numerous activities with celebrity endorsements (Bauman, 2008).

Sport England's "This Girl Can" campaign received much attention nationally and internationally because it represented a fresh approach to social marketing campaigns – there was no educational component in its traditional form; rather, the education being offered was an inclusive view of women's physical activity that disrupts feminine body ideals with regards to appearance and movement. Designed to close the gap between the number of men and women participating in sports and physical activity, the campaign attended to the issue of female objectification. "We want to help women overcome the fear of judgment that is stopping too many women and girls from joining in," says the homepage (This Girl Can, 2017). Like the VERB campaign, images playing out to catchy music work to normalize the female body in sport and physical activity. Videos show women of all shapes, sizes, colours, and abilities participating in multiple activities,

moving unashamedly in numerous styles of clothing – one to the beat of Missy Eliot’s “Get Your Freak On” and another to the spoken word of Maya Angelou’s “Phenomenal Woman.” According to Sport England (2016), after one year the campaign has induced 2.8 million women between 14 and 40 years old to do some or an increased amount of activity. Independent research is required to evaluate the program further, but perhaps the popularity of this campaign – with 37 million YouTube views, 540 000 women joining the social media community, and 660 000 tweets – is representative of future success for campaigns that withhold risk prevention messages, and instead work to shift social norms through a more nuanced form of educational initiatives.

The lifestyle approach, when not partnered with community programming, environmental changes, resources, and policy changes, is sometimes akin to the idea of the ‘self-made man/woman’ (interestingly, one does not often hear of a ‘self-made woman’). People who proclaim to be ‘self-made’ fail to recognize the opportunities that were available to them, the timing of situations unfolding around them, ones that became advantageous for them, and the amount of their success they owe to sheer coincidence. In *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008), Malcolm Gladwell explores numerous case studies of exceptional people and the circumstances that led to their success. He writes of Jeb Bush, who calls himself a self-made man. Bush is son of a USA President and brother of another USA President. He is a white, upper class, male. He is not self-made, and calling himself thus allows him to pat himself on the back and say, “If I can do it, so can you.” While not concerning health, Gladwell’s book highlights the idea that working hard sometimes isn’t enough; sometimes there are factors outside of one’s control that can

very negatively or very positively affect one's future. The book's popularity is perhaps a sign that people are ready to recognize these factors.

Neo-liberal rationalities take on a judgmental tone, lack empathy and care for human needs, and do not promote real, lived health. According to Marmot (2005), telling the Aboriginal populations of Australia to take better care of themselves, would not be helpful. We must, instead, examine the "causes of the causes" (Marmot, 2005, p. 1102). If the Aboriginals of Australia are dying earlier because they are overweight and they smoke and drink, what is causing their unhealthy living habits? If women are less physically active than men, what is causing the physical inactivity?

Social determinants of health (SDH) describe the unequal distribution of economic and societal factors that influence the overall health of individuals, communities, and nations (Raphael, 2004b; 2011). They also determine "the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment" (Raphael, 2004b, p. 1). Social equity as a health factor has been understood to some degree since the mid-1800s and SDH have maintained a prominence in Canadian health policy documents since the mid-1970s, making Canada a leader in the international health field (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). However, Canada lags behind other nations in the actual implementation of policy and in improving the SDH. According to the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (2008), Canada is experiencing the largest increases in income inequality within developed nations (cited in Bryant, 2009). Raphael (2004a) states, "Canada's shortcomings in addressing the social determinants of health are surprising, as tremendous increases have occurred in our theoretical and empirical

knowledge of how economies and social conditions determine health” (p. 2). Despite the attention paid to SDH in policy documents worldwide, and especially in Canada, individuals are greatly uninformed about the social factors that are shaping their lives and their health, and Canada is failing to implement policies that address SDH (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). The 14 SDH for Canadians that are described by Raphael are:

- Aboriginal status
- Disability
- Early life
- Education
- Employment and working conditions
- Food insecurity
- Health services
- Gender
- Housing
- Income and income distribution
- Race
- Social exclusion
- Social safety net
- Unemployment and job security

The effects of the SDH are greater than those of individual behaviour or lifestyle choices and biomedical factors (Raphael, 2002). In other words, SDH are better predictors of individual and population health than factors such as diet, exercise, and smoking (Raphael, 2002). Because of the importance of the SDH, the World Health Organization (WHO) created the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, which published its final report in 2008; that report highlights the health inequities between and

within countries, stresses the importance of societal factors, and makes recommendations for future action.

Much of the research on SDH has been conducted by British researchers who focus on health disparities among members of differing economic statuses (Raphael, 2004a; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006; Siegrist & Marmot, 2006). Canadian studies usually focus on economic status and how incidence of poverty is related to health (Raphael, 2004a). The majority of SDH research prioritizes economic status because, arguably, it has the greatest impact on the health of the most people. As Raphael (2004a) explains, “Income is especially important as it serves as a marker of different experiences with many social determinants of health” (p. 8). Income influences a great number of variables and outcomes, such as early life, nutrition, access to healthcare, housing, education, a sense of belonging, and social support. The relationship between socioeconomic status and health is based on material conditions as well as psychosocial conditions related to acute and chronic stress that lead to biological health issues (See, Raphael, 2002; Phipps, 2003; Lynch, et al, 2000; Kawachi, 2000; Bartley, Ferrie & Montgomery, 2006; Shaw, Dorling, & Smith, 2006).

Gender, specifically femininity, is the SDH that lies at the center of this dissertation. The lack of attention paid to gender within health promotion research is discussed in the following section.

Gender as a SDH

Gender is a SDH because societal values, expectations, and norms of men and women lead to health disparities. The gender gap in health is universal due to the “different socially sanctioned options, opportunities, and realities men and women face”

(Phillips, 2011, p. 16). According to the WHO's Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008), millions of girls and women are affected negatively from a health perspective due to gender inequities. Gender biases and inequities prevent women from full participation in economic pursuits, limit their decision-making power over their own health, undervalue their work as caretakers and life-givers, lead to violence against women, limit their access to education, and reduce their chances of occupying positions of power within their families, communities, and countries (WHO, 2008). While gender expectations also affect the health of men (for example, higher risk behaviour leading to premature death), the SDH literature on gender primarily focuses on women's health because "women have more limited access to, and less control over, resources, and over their bodies and lives, than men do" (Phillips, 2005, p. 2).

According to Phillips (2011), gender, while often listed as a SDH, is rarely studied. Bryant (2009) agrees, stating there is a "dearth of research that considers gender and how it interacts with the social determinants of health to increase the risk of adverse health outcomes" (p.3). Like income, gender is a SDH that is a strong predictor of other determinants, especially income. Raphael (2004) states, "A key aspect of...the experience of women in Canada is their greater likelihood of living under conditions of low income" (p. 8). Because of this relationship between income and gender, some studies (See, Bryant, 2009; Raphael & Bryant, 2010) have examined gender from a feminist, political, economic perspective, which

considers how the organization, production, and distribution of economic and social resources — such as employment, health care, and housing, lead to different exposures, i.e. different types of housing and

environmental conditions — that result in inequalities in health outcomes in a population (p.3).

As the welfare state disappears due to public policy decisions, the gap between the rich and poor is growing, and “women are especially susceptible to these adverse public policy decisions” (Bryant, 2009, p. 2).

Bryant (2009) found that neo-liberal government policies in Canada, such as the removal of rent control in the 1990s and the reduction of income transfers has had an especially negative effect on women for a number of reasons. Women have lower incomes than men (one-third to two-thirds of men’s incomes, historically). Single-parent families have lower incomes, and 85% of Canadian single-parent families and more than 90% of poor single-parent families are women-led (National Council of Welfare, cited in Bryant, 2009). Women are more likely to be precariously employed in part-time positions without benefits (Bryant, 2009). Women also do more unpaid work, as they are socially assigned the role of caretaker and homemaker. Martin and Campbell (cited in McMunn et al., 2006) found that despite women’s increased presence in the labour force, a significant gender divide remains within the household labour force, specifically with regards to the role of carer, which more often falls to women. McMunn et al. (2006) goes on to state, “Gender imbalances in caring responsibilities might be a factor in explaining gender differences in both labour force participation and social participation” (p. 281).

In their examination of gender, socioeconomic status, and obesity, Broom and Warin (2011) found that while socioeconomic status and obesity are inversely related for women, they are positively associated for men. They ask an interesting question: Who can afford to be obese? The answer: women of high socioeconomic status are not obese because they cannot afford to be obese. Female obesity leads to social and economic

sanctions, while male obesity does not. For example, obese women are less likely to attend post-secondary education, less likely to get married or be in a long-term relationships, less likely to be financially successful or be gainfully employed (Broom & Warin, 2011). Broom and Warin (2011) also suggest that women of higher socioeconomic status might be more in touch with societal pressures to be thin and attractive than women of lower socioeconomic status. This hypothesis brings forth numerous issues for feminist researchers. What role is ideal beauty playing in women's lives at all socio-economic levels? Is it responsible to some degree for some women's healthy weights? What is the tradeoff between mental health and body weight? Might a healthy diet and exercise actually be oppressive for some women, and if so, what are feminist health promoters to do?

These issues are not well understood because the approach taken in gender health research is largely epidemiological. It provides necessary statistical reassurance, through the sex disaggregation of data, that relationships exist between gender and health, but it does not deconstruct the *nature* of those relationships. Most SDH research is quantitative and based on statistical observation, rather than experimental research (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006). Survey research highlights broad patterns and important issues, and according to Broom and Warin (2011), "The findings from surveys, however, can rarely make useful theoretical or policy sense by themselves: they also require interpretation that is guided and elaborated by information from other social science research methods and epistemologies" (p.457). Relying solely on statistical analysis does not acknowledge the lived reality of women's lives (Hankivisky et al., 2010). Because of the gap in health research related to differing methodologies and epistemologies, gender is well

represented as a health variable on the national and international level, and is not well understood as an experienced phenomena on the individual and group level. Phillips (2011) states,

Gender analyses could and should extend well beyond stratification of data by sex to examine differences between men and women arising from social circumstances...Methodologies for measuring gender equity and equality, although underdeveloped and underutilized, could enrich understanding of associations and causal pathways from exposure to health outcomes (p.20).

We must look past the “superficially unproblematic meanings of health statistics, the language of ‘epidemics’ and the apparently ‘obvious’ solutions to public health systems” (Broom & Warin, 2011, p. 461) and instead engage with different methodologies that “have equally essential contributions to make to the formulation of research questions and strategies” (p.461).

Research in the sociology of sport and physical activity has used differing methodologies and epistemologies, those called for in health research, to examine the nature of the relationship between gender and physical activity. The majority of studies, discussed below, fall into two categories: those using a Foucauldian analysis, and to a lesser extent those that examine sport and physical activity through a phenomenological lens.

Foucauldian analysis studies

‘Governmentality’ is a term coined by Michel Foucault in the 1970s that describes “techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour” (Foucault, 1997, p.82). This direction goes beyond the government of state and into the lives of individuals who

govern themselves and others based on social and cultural ideals or ‘norms.’ Foucault (1997) explains, “Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself” (p.82). These ideologies are created through discourses that are well-practiced and pervasive in our everyday lives. Dominant discourses act as governmental technologies through their morally-laden messages that influence behaviour. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979), Foucault describes the panopticon, a prison structure in which the cells surround a watch station that may or may not be empty, as a useful metaphor that demonstrates the practice of self-governance based on social control mechanisms. These mechanisms create social norms that reinforce power relationships, play on individuals’ desires to ‘fit in,’ and turn them into ‘docile’ bodies. Foucault (1979) describes these disciplinary practices in terms of prisons, hospitals, and school systems, while others, discussed below, have taken his theory into the everyday practices of shaping the ideal body. The actions being generated through discursive technologies are often linked to consumerism and they support a capitalistic society (Guthman & DuPuis, 2006).

Governmentality is a useful theory that has been used to analyze the health behaviours of women. Eskes, Duncan, and Miller (1998) used critical discourse analysis to study women’s fitness magazine texts, and found that physical health for women is equated with beauty. In an analysis of *Shape* magazine, Duncan (1994) found the “Success Stories” feature encourages women to continuously monitor their body weight, underscoring the idea that healthy living is primarily done to improve one’s appearance. In her article, “Firm but shapely, Fit but sexy, Strong but thin: The postmodern aerobicizing female body,” Markula (1995) used a Foucauldian perspective to explore the

discourses that have created the contradictory media ideal that women are meant to live up to physically. Each of these studies focused on women's bodies as docile and self-disciplining – bodies that are worked on and practiced towards normative subjectivities (Markula & Pringle 2006).

Dominant discourses can be characterized as social control mechanisms that are so embedded in society they become taken-for-granted and can go unnoticed (Eskes, Duncan, and Miller, 1998). Foucault (1988) explains that power is everywhere and nowhere; it cannot be grasped or acquired. Rather, power exists within relationships between individuals and groups. Therefore, the same activity can be transformational and/or oppressive depending on one's reasons for doing it. Johns and Johns (2000) found that gymnasts' diets allowed some athletes a personal transformation, while others were dominated through disciplinary practices. Chapman (1997) studied the weight management of women's lightweight rowers and found similar results. Wesely (2001) found that heavily built female body builders were successfully challenging expectations of femininity while simultaneously buying into new appearance-based ideals. Markula (2003) states that we must ask women to articulate their critical self-awareness if we are to understand the meanings behind women's exercise behaviour. According to McDermott (2000), "there has been very little research that attempts to understand the meaning and significance of women's lived-body physical activity experiences from their perspective" (p.338). None of the aforementioned researchers asked their participants about their own critical awareness of gendered and sexist expectations, and we cannot know if the participants' actions were transformational and/or disciplinary.

Phenomenological analysis studies

While a Foucauldian perspective focuses on the individual ‘folding in’ of the outside (the ways we deal with dominant discourses), the lived body perspective focuses on person-centered experience from inside the body. The lived body is a phenomenological concept that is especially relevant to women’s health research. According to Vertinsky (1998),

The interrelationship, therefore, among culture, structure, behavior and identity lies at the center of the lived experience of the body, health and illness, and any theorizing about the body as a site of control, resistance or transformation has to be grounded in the lived experience which is the articulation of these relationships (p.100).

Despite its relevance to feminist research, feminist phenomenology has been slow to emerge, held back by criticisms of the non-gendered approach to analysis and fear of the female experience being over-essentialized (Fisher & Embree, 2000). While, at the time of this writing, apparently absent in SDH research, feminist phenomenology and the concept of the lived body have recently been taken up to some extent from a sociological perspective in women’s studies of sport and physical activity (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Young’s (1980) often-cited paper, “Throwing like a girl,” references the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and describes how socialized femininity is embodied in the ways girls and women move and take up space. According to Young (1980), women exhibit ambiguous transcendence (disconnectedness from the world), inhibited intentionality (going out into the world with a self-imposed ‘I cannot’), and discontinuous unity (moving only parts of the body, leaving the rest in stillness). More recent research that examines sport and physical activity also finds that women often experience their bodies as objects, rather than subjects (McDermott, 2000). They exist within a mind/body

dichotomy where one's own body is viewed not as a part of the self, but from an outside perspective that is continuously and critically monitoring, comparing, and shaping the body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Liimakka, 2008). These body practices are often related to discourses regarding ideal femininity (Bordo, 1993; Markula, 1995, 2001; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998). Leder (1990) characterizes this practice as 'social dys-appearance,' the *dys*functionality of the body making it *appear* as an object that is separate from the self, a result of the objectifying gaze of others.

In her criticism of Young's emphasis on gender over lived body, Chisholm (2008) explains that Young

conceptualizes girls' and women's experience of embodiment within a restrictive history of gender normativity that no longer typifies their contemporary situation and that fails to account for the phenomenology of their "ascendance" in new realms of freedom and existence (p. 10).

Chisholm (2008) goes on to say of Young, "She narrows the field of phenomenological inquiry to prohibitive feminine motility and experience to the exclusion of women's transformative experience" (p. 11). Bringing the focus back to the lived body, Chisholm (2008) and other feminist phenomenologists (McDermott, 200; Liimakka, 2011) have looked for the transformational lived bodies of women. Interestingly, Chisholm turned to the best female rock climber in the world and analyzed her autobiography to demonstrate what she believes feminist phenomenology should look like.

McDermott (2000) studied women in an aerobics class and women who participated in a wilderness canoeing trip. She found the aerobicizers viewed their bodies as objects of appearance criticism, but that joining aerobics gave them unexpected positive experiences of improved physical literacy (moving confidently and with

competence) and enjoyment of physical activity. Still, they were inclined to speak of their bodies as objects. The wilderness canoeists did not view their bodies as objects, but as parts of themselves that helped them experience nature, physical activity and challenge, and empowerment, and McDermott was able to use phenomenological concepts to discuss their experiences. It seems that some women are able to describe their transformational lived body experiences, while others are more inclined to speak of themselves as objects, providing researchers with little to discuss regarding the lived body, besides its, to all intents and purposes, absence.

Liimakka (2011) used Women's Studies' students as participants under the assumption they would have some form of feminist critical and body awareness. They participated in group discussions and completed writing assignments. The women described their bodies both as objects and as parts of themselves that they lived through. In her paper (2011), "I am my body: Objectification, empowering embodiment, and physical activity in women's studies students' accounts," Liimakka gives little attention or space to the self-objectification that participants described and focuses mostly on their transformational experiences, as if trying to prove, like Chisholm also seems to be doing, that physical activity is empowering and phenomenology should be used to demonstrate this fact.

Liimakka (2011) states, "While the feminist drawing from Foucault...defined empowerment through the mind's or the body's resistance to the existing power structures, the feminist phenomenological approach focuses on the transformative potential of the individual body experiences" (p.443). This seems to hold true for more recent research; yet, I get a sense from reading the literature that researchers are trying to

label certain activities as either empowering or disempowering, rather than simply finding out what are the lived experiences of those activities.

Following in Young's footsteps, feminist phenomenological studies on sport and physical activity largely draw on Merleau-Ponty's existential philosophy. This seems appropriate, due to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) emphasis on the lived body and the important role the body plays in sport and physical activity. Yet, while the authors discuss how existentialism is relevant to their study in introductory sections of their papers, there is little evidence of a phenomenological lens throughout data analysis and/or results' presentation, making these studies more characteristic of generic qualitative research than phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2009). This masking of generic qualitative research as phenomenology is not uncommon in other fields, and is perhaps due to the complexity of phenomenology and the many ways it has been interpreted (Finlay, 2009). My own sense, having considered the possible options for my study, is that the data required to examine the sensual aspects of world-body connection are hard to retrieve from participants who, according to other research, do not live *through* their bodies, but view them as objects. To collect data for an existential phenomenological study of women's transformational experiences, Chisholm (2008) turned to the autobiography of the best female climber in the world. Young's "Throwing like a girl" is *ipso facto* based on observation, rather than participants' experiences.

Allen-Collinson (2009, 2011a, 2011b) has taken a different approach to data collection in order to explore the lived experiences that are perhaps difficult to draw out of participants. She uses autophenomenography to provide thick descriptions of her own experiences of distance running, and then discusses them from a feminist

phenomenological lens. Autophenomenography is an “autobiographical genre in which the phenomenological researcher is both researcher and participant in her/his study of a particular phenomenon, subjecting her/his own lived experience to sustained and rigorous phenomenological analysis” (Allen-Collinson, 2011a, p.307). It differs from autoethnography because the analysis of experience takes place within a specific phenomenon, rather than a ‘cultural place’ (Allen-Collinson, 2011a). Writing about her own experiences provides a unique opportunity to describe the very personal and corporeal interactions between body and world. Allen-Collinson (2011c) discusses the distinctive questions regarding epoché and bracketing (setting aside one’s judgments and beliefs), common phenomenological practices, this method presents. Her work strikes me as very perceptive especially when compared to other phenomenological studies that sometimes appear to be forcing women’s physical activity into a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ category of empowerment, rather than simply describing an experience.

Taking the literature into account, there is a need for research that makes use of qualitative methodologies and non-positivist epistemologies to explore the nature of the relationship between gender and health, specifically femininity and women’s physical activity. This research could begin to determine the participants’ critical awareness by accessing their opinions, rather than simply their experiences, in order to understand how and why an activity is transformational versus oppressive. An appreciation for the complexity of women’s lived body experiences with physical activity throughout their lives may inform future health promotion policy that considers the overall wellbeing of individuals, rather than simply how many minutes per day or week they are exercising.

A Reflexive Introduction to Methodological Choice

I have experienced great difficulty in choosing an appropriate methodology for this study, and I believe a reflexive discussion might be a useful approach for introducing the methodology I finally did choose, narrative inquiry. I have gone back and forth many times between research question and methodology, all the while distinctly aware that I was continuously slipping past the meeting point between the two where a certain coherence was out of reach. In other words, it didn't feel right.

This has been a very different experience compared to the writing of my master's thesis. It was then I was introduced to autoethnography during a meeting with Megan Popovic (2010) and subsequent reading of her article, "A voice in the rink: Playing with our histories and evoking autoethnography." I had never read anything like it in academia – it drew me in, entertained me, made me think, question, feel. Before I knew it, I had read her entire paper without once lifting my eyes from the pages. I knew right away, as a female athlete studying women's sport history, this was the methodology for me. And it fit. Autoethnography gave me, an introspective and creative person, the freedom to write in a way that felt natural to me. While it is not be the overarching methodology for this dissertation for reasons explained below, Chapter Three is an autoethnography, and this seems a good place to unpack this methodology in brief fashion.

Autoethnography and awakening from an academic slumber

Autoethnography is both a method and methodology; it is the process and the product of making the personal political (Holman-Jones, 2005). Through an exploration of lived experience, researchers use creative, embodied, evocative, and poetic means to

tell stories that reflect the broader culture of which an individual is a part. Ellis (2004) writes,

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (p.37).

Authors do not act as representations of culture or social practice; rather, they highlight individual particularities of common or uncommon experiences that weave together a tapestry of human life.

Autoethnography provides a space for me to play with the intermingling parts of my Self – academic and graduate student, teacher, woman, athlete, Canadian, rural northerner in a southern city, nature-lover, and feminist. With autoethnography I am no longer what Bochner (1997) refers to as the divided self, a social science researcher ignoring, suppressing, or even escaping my situatedness and my own involvement in the world I study. I am able to draw on my own life experiences as one methodological component used to understand and examine social phenomena in an academic setting. Autoethnographic writing represents a view from somewhere, a responsible claim to truth with a lower case ‘t,’ as opposed to objective science’s “conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway, 2003, p. 26).

While grounded in social constructionism, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe the blurred lines that characterize experimental methodologies, identifying qualitative researchers as ‘bricoleurs,’ who pull what they need from various locations to create texts that are messy and layered in experience and meaning. The beauty of autoethnography to

me is its ability to be what I need it to be (McParland, 2012; 2013). It bends with a flexibility that defies the hard and fast lines drawn between paradigms and within our dichotomy constructing social practices, while at the same time maintaining a sense of responsibility to take care of others and the self, to be grounded in lived experience and individual perspective.

My own perception of autoethnography fits within a critical dimension. As a methodology that exists on the periphery of traditional, male, white social science and the power/knowledge nexus, autoethnography has created an opening for marginalized, metaphorical voices to be written and read while previously devalued ways of knowing are explored. There is a sense of freedom in acknowledging the messiness of lived experience and the impossibility of putting all of the pieces together without knowing what the puzzle is supposed to look like in the end. No longer constricted by one-dimensional notions of knowing, one might allow herself to write a poem for the first time because her intuition tells her it is the best way to communicate the feeling in her body that has been itching to attach itself to words; she might use sarcasm and wit to make you like her so you'll listen to what she has to say; she may write an entire page of unanswerable questions simply to convey the complexity of being; she might paint a picture with her words in order for you to step into her shoes and live inside her for a moment in time. To do autoethnography is to take a deep breath, silence the academic rule-enforcing voices, and just live and write within a space that is at once one's own and shared with others and Others.

Autoethnography, along with other performative methodologies, is created *for* and *with* others, an audience (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). Researchers create stories and

texts *for* others – to break their hearts, to move them towards change, to stand beside them within a collective consciousness, to point towards the possibilities of experience and being (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Words on a page come alive as the reader is drawn into a genuine dialogue *with* the text and its author. Ideas bounce back and forth, as meaning is transmitted or constructed, depending on how much interpretive room the author permits.

Writing can be a feminist practice that allows us to be where change is necessary (Richardson, 1997). Autoethnography can be utilized to investigate and express the embodied knowing that is the starting place of women's lives and stories. Writing myself into the research provides an incredible opportunity to examine the lived body in a way that is not possible with other data collection and analysis methods. The middle person is removed as researcher becomes subject, creating a direct connection between Being and its representation. Richardson (1997) writes, "My human body is present in every sentence I write and appears everytime I break out in prose. Thankfully, there is no antidote" (p. 49). As researcher, I can write from inside my body, drawing on metaphor and playing with prose to describe the physical sensations that accompany my everyday lived experience, and that inform my sense of self and my interactions with the social and material world (Sparkes, 2002; 2003).

For these reasons, autoethnography woke me from my academic slumber and made me excited about my own education like I had not been since elementary school. It may seem peculiar that I am reluctant to stick with this methodology for this dissertation. After all, it is familiar and comes naturally to me as a research and writing form, and I believe it is an extremely valuable approach for feminist researchers. Building on the

knowledge I already had, and without the need to recruit participants or gather and transcribe data in the traditional sense, I might very well have graduated years ago. However, there are many things to consider before adopting such an approach when said approach may influence one's academic career and even influence the person one becomes through writing.

An overexposed self-portrait

Writing an autoethnographic dissertation would have been both too easy and too hard. Too easy: I had read the material, knew what to do. The sick, masochistic, likes-a-challenge part of my brain would have none of it. Too hard: travelling inwards into the depths of the self and back out into my feminist-ed disappointment of culture and society for hundreds of pages would be emotionally exhausting, isolating, and scary. It only took three weeks during my comprehensive exams, in which I wrote an autoethnography, to turn me temporarily bat-shit crazy. I became hyper-aware of all forms of sexism and gender inequality operating around me as I searched my own past and present for images, stories, and experiences that might shed some light on interactions between self and the culture of patriarchy within sport and physical activity. Add on the pressure of a looming deadline and an unfamiliar evaluative process that ended in an oral examination and it's no wonder I was in a perpetual state of teeth grinding, fist clenching, shoulders up to ears, eyes bulging, hating everything and everyone who didn't agree with me and should just shut the hell up, and fixating on, of all things, the inherent sexism in yogurt commercials. (Don't men eat yogurt?!) One more dancing Activia belly and I might very well be sitting in a padded room right now instead of my office, which incidentally often feels like solitary confinement.

I suppose, then, my hesitation to stick solely with autoethnography came as a form of self-preservation. I have no desire to transform once again from happy, helpful, supportive, looks-on-the-bright-side and finds-humour-in-everything Shellie to angry, insecure, uncomfortably vulnerable, I'm-taking-everyone-down-with-me Shellie. Perhaps there is a way to write about difficult experiences without completely returning to one's place within them, but how to do this with an ongoing experience, such as gender inequality, and how that might change the quality and honesty of the writing, I am unsure. Autoethnographers often write in terms of what autoethnography can provide for others – it truly is a giving of the self. The effect that writing an autoethnography can have on individuals is also something worth discussing.

Aside from wanting to maintain my sanity, concerns regarding my future in academia have been present in my consideration of autoethnography as methodology. Will anyone want to hire an autoethnographer as a faculty member? Has autoethnography moved far enough past the stage of critiques of narcissism and lack of academic rigour? Should I take my chances on a methodology that others didn't come to until well into their academic careers when they were established and well-respected researchers (See, Richardson, 2000)? No doubt it was a scary thing for these trailblazers to leave their posts as impartial and detached observers. Do I need to do my time on the dark side before it's okay for me to be part of the club?

My general existence within academia has impressed upon me the importance of being published with regards to funding and hiring consideration. While fear of not being published has made me question my own use of autoethnography, fear that I *will* be published has had even more of an impact on my methodological path. I am hesitant to

write an autoethnographic dissertation because people might read it! Indeed, upon seeing my name in print for the first time, it was not a case of, “Look, Mom! I wrote about other people and got published!” Rather, my eyes quickly scanned the paper, as I remembered the bits of myself that I had thrown out into the open, and I thought, *Oh my god, people are going to see this*. This is not 1980, and academic journals do not exist solely in hard copy, collecting dust in university libraries. This is the digital age, and academic articles are only a click away. Everything that is published is attached to my name – a name that, when Google searched, will reveal this online version of myself that I have had little control over creating and is quite incomplete, while also noticeably skewed towards only two parts of me – track and field results and critical feminist writing.

The lack of control I feel regarding the impression of me one might gather from a quick search makes me uneasy. The 20-something year old version of myself that wrote these papers remains trapped within the pages. These papers I have published will not grow and change along with me; yet, I am stuck with them forever. When I have children and I tell them not to swear, will they reference the “fuck” in my master’s thesis? With autoethnography, you better be damn sure you mean what you say. Unfortunately, as a graduate student, scrambling to get publications on a CV, there isn’t time to step away from one’s writing in order to come back to it with some added perspective and say ‘Yes, I still want to reveal myself in this way,’ or ‘I feel differently now, but what I wrote remains meaningful and I am comfortable allowing others into this experience,’ or ‘I sound like an enormous douche-bag. Thank goodness I didn’t publish this.’

I have come to realize that I am a private person who is somewhat uncomfortable with sharing the very personal stories that, ironically, flow so naturally from my pen. I

wonder if I should have, could have published under a different name. How much more freely would I let the words flow out of me? What parts of lived experience would I dive into that I otherwise wouldn't? And, what would keep me grounded in my truth, if not my name? In the end, it would be irresponsible to not take ownership of my work – this would be a view from nowhere.

Lastly, I've resisted the draw to autoethnography (a draw that still exists despite the above-mentioned issues) because I have a genuine curiosity regarding other women's experiences. The idea of meeting strangers and conducting interviews is appealing to me, as, despite my recognition of autoethnography as an excellent form of research, I have this juvenile feeling that going out into the traditional 'field,' voice recorder in hand, will make me feel like a 'real' researcher. I know it's silly, but it's there, perhaps an example of the ways I have been taught through formal education, conversation, story, and film to think about 'research.'

There are many things to consider when autoethnography is a methodological option. I certainly would not change the path through which I became an academic. I believe an autoethnographic start set me up well to do other kinds of research, and to understand my place within that research.

A Personal Worldview

Using a somewhat contested and non-traditional research methodology as a master's student forced me to examine and understand the underlying epistemological and ontological belief systems that brought autoethnography into fruition and made it a legitimate methodology. I would have to defend its legitimacy at conferences, within

academic interactions, and during my thesis defense in a way that perhaps those using more traditional methodologies would not. I think this allowed me to locate myself paradigmatically, making all of my subsequent reading, writing, thinking, and understanding personal in a way I had not expected – not because I was dealing with autoethnography, which is personal, of course, but because my new understanding of knowledge and researcher situatedness became a part of my consciousness. When trying on a number of methodologies in the construction of my study, I believe it was this consciousness that gave me the gut feeling that something was off.

The personal connection to my research is strengthened by my female and feminist identity, which has certainly distanced me from an epistemological position of objectivity. It is the objective position that Haraway (2003) refers to as the ‘god trick,’ and indeed it encouraged the continued marginalization of women’s voices and of different and embodied ways of knowing. Subjectivity, alternately, relies on a judgmental relativism. Objectivity and subjectivity are described by Harding (1991) as two sides of the same coin. If we cannot know everything, then we can know nothing. A subjective location does not permit truth claims and impedes the ability of feminist researchers to progress towards equality because any statements can be refuted based on mere opinion.

Feminist standpoint theory calls for historical, cultural, and sociological relativism, but not for judgmental relativism or weak objectivity (Harding, 1991). Akin to Haraway’s (2003) feminist objectivity, which simply means situated knowledges, Harding’s strong objectivity is action oriented and designed to move towards a whole truth, while always aware that we will never get there. Knowing is not relative; it is

historically situated, it is dependent on location and time, and it is partial. I am reminded of Saxe's poem, "The Blind Men and the Elephant:"

*It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.*

*The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"*

*The Second, feeling of the tusk
Cried, "Ho! what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elaphant
Is very like a spear!"*

*The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"*

*The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;*

*“’Tis clear enough the Elephant
 Is very like a tree!”*
*The Fifth who chanced to touch the ear,
 Said: “E’en the blindest man
 Can tell what this resembles most;
 Deny the fact who can,
 This marvel of an Elephant
 Is very like a fan!”*
*The Sixth no sooner had begun
 About the beast to grope,
 Than, seizing on the swinging tail
 That fell within his scope.
 “I see,” quoth he, “the Elephant
 Is very like a rope!”*
*And so these men of Indostan
 Disputed loud and long,
 Each in his own opinion
 Exceeding stuff and strong,
 Though each was partly in the right,
 And all were in the wrong!*

This poem is “a criticism of the blindness of theologians and philosophers” (Marshall, 2008). It was the shift from Empiricist and Rationalist queries regarding reality and truth to the problem of human perspectivalness that brought forth Hegel’s phenomenology. As others built on his work – Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty – the human limitation of perspective transformed from a problem to be overcome to an essential aspect of being human (Marshall, 2008).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) criticized philosophy for its obsession with the reality question – is what is in the mind real or is what is outside of the mind real? – rather than

giving due attention to the limitations of these conceptions of reality. His issue with 'being,' as with reality, is it is understood as either material or intellectual. He brings attention to the space in between that he calls "ambiguity." Things cannot be as simple as mind or body and material or intellectual, Merleau-Ponty believes, for when one returns to lived experience with such absolute claims there are contradictions. Life is messy, varied, changing in its space, time, interactions and experiences. These contradictions provide us the opportunity to witness the complexity and depth of what truth may be.

Phenomenology and wisps of a doctoral candidate

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on lived experience, and specifically the lived body, drew my attention to phenomenology as a possible methodology for my study.

"Phenomenology can provide the style for an analysis which retrieves and retains the immediate, vibrant, tangible, and compelling lived experience..." (Fisher, 2010, p. 94).

Numerous feminist researchers have taken up Merleau-Ponty because of his acknowledgment of the body as knowing (Fisher & Embree, 2000; Olkowski & Weiss, 2006). Women have so often been spoken for, the idea of letting women speak for themselves to simply describe their physical activity experiences in a pre-reflective manner, rather than make meaning from them, seemed very appealing. I was simultaneously drawn to the idea that I could strip away cultural influences to arrive at the essence of women's body movement and also aware that this was not actually possible and probably wouldn't serve women well anyways.

Aware of the many studies that attempt phenomenology, but fall into generic qualitative research, I wondered if I would fare any better. What would I do if my

participants didn't describe their experiences as lived, but rather from a third person perspective, as many women do (Leder, 1990; McDermott, 2000)? I went in and out of the phenomenological literature and returned time and again with bits and pieces of new understanding to the fear of finishing my dissertation and being left with a 'so what?' kind of feeling. What would I really be able to say at the end of it all?

As a graduate student I am continuously drawn away from the present by thoughts, fears, images of the future. It is exceedingly difficult to live in the moment and take life as it comes when I feel as if my life is actually on hold. I'm simply on pause until I walk across the stage one final time at graduation and my life can finally begin again. I have no anchor tying me to the here and now. Instead, my philosophical readings make me feel light as a breeze, to be blown away at any moment. Who am I? Why am I here? My bi-weekly existential crisis is fed by wandering thoughts of what is to become of me.

Plagued with the feeling that phenomenology wouldn't allow me to get at the thing I was most interested in without being able to define that thing was exceedingly frustrating. I was so attached to the idea of the lived body that it became increasingly difficult to see other research options. After months of uneasiness and stumbling around the phenomenology literature, I was forced to admit that finding out what the lived body experiences of my participants are wasn't enough for me. I don't want to strip away the culture to get at pre-reflective experience – I want to know the role culture plays in women's experiences with physical activity. I want the post-reflective – what their experiences mean to them, how they make sense of them, and how they story them.

When I finally let go of phenomenology and stopped trying to stuff my study into a methodology that didn't fit, I arrived at narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry and finding a place in story

The word 'narrative' can refer to both text and method (Muller, 1999).

Understood as text, it is often used interchangeably with 'story' to describe the act of storytelling as well as the finished product. "Narratives, most simply put, are stories that relate the unfolding of events, human action, or human suffering from the perspective of an individual's lived experience" (Muller, 1999, p.221). Czarniawska (2004) states, "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p.17).

'Narrative' also refers to a method of inquiry in qualitative research, characterized by Chase (2008) as "an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them" (p.58). Within this context, narrative inquiry is a relatively new methodology resulting from the 'narrative turn,' in which researchers expressed the inadequacy of current scientific methods for explaining the complexity and variability of lived experience (Czarniawska, 2004). Its use began to rise steadily in the mid-1980s and has grown tremendously in the past decade, especially in the fields of "psychology, gender studies, education, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, law, and history" (Lieblich et al, 1998, p.3).

While an emerging methodology, storytelling has always been a part of human life. According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), "Narrative inquiry is a ubiquitous practice in that, human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long

as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long” (p. 35). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state,

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (p.375).

As people who understand ourselves and our experiences through story, it makes sense to study experience narratively.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write of the tension between the boundary of narrative thinking and the grand narrative of how research is to be done. Like autoethnography, narrative exists on the periphery of traditional knowledge construction. Similar to Merleau-Ponty and his warning of extreme absolutism, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue against technical rationalism that reduces experience to formulaic rules. The disembodied mind that is necessary for such certainty to exist falsely is not called for in narrative; rather, it is the emotion, embodied knowing, memory, and felt experience that makes narratives “unable to stand still in a way that allows for certainty” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 37). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiak, and Zilber (1998) write, “The narrative approach advocates pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity” (p.2); yet, similar to standpoint theory, I sense the previous authors’ skepticism of a relativist position as they stake a middle ground, continuing, “We believe that stories are usually

constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these ‘remembered facts’” (p. 8). Narrative inquiry allows for a sense of coherence between my own ontological and epistemological situatedness, my desire to learn about women’s physical activity experiences *and* the significance of how they speak about those experiences, my aspiration to conduct interviews with other women, and my penchant for non-traditional representations of research through storytelling.

Just as I ‘play’ with numerous forms of narrative representation in this dissertation, I also ‘play’ with an eclectic range of feminist theories. I include in my writing, as an act of transparency, my wonderings regarding the influence my feminist theoretical perspective has on what I write and how my data analysis and representation would be altered should I slide myself further towards one end of the modernist – postmodernist continuum. In Chapter Two, I use the work of Cixious (1986), Sheets-Johnstone (2000), Spender (1978, as cited in Stanley & Wise, 1983), and Irigaray (as cited in Butler, 2001) to demonstrate the infiltration of male/female dichotomous thought into ontological and epistemological positionings in academia. Chodorow (1997) uses a modernist approach to feminist psychoanalytic theory, focusing on gender difference as a positive revaluing of ‘feminine’ characteristics of relational being and interpersonal closeness. I am weary of the essentialist tendencies in gender difference, women-centered approaches to feminism; yet, I am drawn to the idea of alternative, specifically performative, forms of social science as a celebration of the ‘feminine’ – embodied knowing with an emphasis on connection and closeness – and a challenge to

‘malestream’ social science that emphasizes impartiality and distance between researchers and their subjects.

Perhaps it is simply the novel feeling of having the ‘feminine,’ which I am meant to represent as a woman, valued above the ‘masculine’ that tempts me to work within a modernist paradigm and simply “throw off androcentric power” (Beasley, 2005, p.48) to reveal my true, authentic self as woman. My critical location, however, makes it impossible for me to accept the idea of inherent forms of femininity and masculinity. I know from my previous autoethnographic writing (McParland, 2013; 2012) on my lived experiences as a female/athlete – two identities that are socially constructed to actually deny their cohesive existence within one body – that I am more comfortable in recognizing plural femininities, multiple meanings, and many, complex ways of being female and feminine.

Grosz (1989) describes Derrida’s explanation of women falling into two categories:

...there are two kinds of women: feminists whose project is simply the reversal of phallogocentrism, that is, who strive to be like men, to have a fixed identity, a natural essence and a place to occupy as subjects: and women who differ from rather than act as the opposites of the masculine, thus subverting and threatening to undermine masculine privilege. While clearly not mutually exclusive...this distinction nevertheless involves a separation between those women who strive for identity (of whatever kind) and those who abandon the (phallogocentric) demand for a stable identity and destabilize logocentrism itself (p.33).

I reside in the latter, critical camp with the belief, informed by Butler (1990; 1993), that there are no fixed (gender) identities. Categories are social constructions and postmodern feminists “are concerned to displace identity categories (essences) and the

dichotomous or binary thinking in which they are embedded (essential oppositions)” (Beasley, 2005, p.100). In Chapter Two, I deconstruct the modernist dichotomous thought through a critical postmodern argument for performative methodologies. These methodologies have come into fruition through the ‘narrative turn’ by the work of many scholars, some of whom I draw on, including Richardson (1997; 2001), Ellis (1995; 1999; 2004), Bochner (1997), and Sparkes (2002; 2003).

I am reminded by the aforementioned scholars to bring the body into my writing – not as a form of biological essentialism, but as a form of critical hermeneutics that enables genuine dialogue, connection, and understanding, and as a material form that is culturally produced. According to Butler (1990; 1993), the body is gendered performance, a cultural and social construction through which identity is created. There is no true, real, or core meaning or experience inherent in femininity or the category ‘woman.’ Drawing on Foucault, Butler describes disciplinary regimes that influence individuals to act out a performance of gender that ascribes to and reinforces gender norms.

As a biologist, Haraway (1991) recognizes the need for feminists to move away from biological essentialism, but she is uncomfortable with Butler’s complete socialization of the body for fear it will become nothing more than “a blank page for social inscriptions” (p.197). She offers a corpomaterialist alternative that theorizes the body as an “apparatus of bodily production” and an active agent (Haraway, 1991, p.208). For Haraway, the body is the site where intersections of sex, race, and class are produced – a site that is at once a “network of physical matter/living facticity and discursive social construction” (Lykke, 2010, p.118). It is from this position that I attempt to determine

meanings about the female body – mine and participants’ – and the context of the body within physical activity.

Plan of Presentation

This chapter provided an introduction that situated myself and my study within the field of health promotion. It specified definitions for ‘physical activity’ and ‘exercise,’ which are maintained throughout the dissertation. I also offered a literature review, highlighting the need for studies within health promotion that make use of qualitative and experimental methodologies. Then I explained my rationale for choosing narrative inquiry as methodology, while also providing a reflexive explanation of autoethnography, a sub-category of narrative inquiry that is utilized in this dissertation.

Chapter Two, entitled “Fusions of Dichotomous Horizons: Performative Social Science as Feminist Practice,” is a methodological issue article that further situates myself as researcher through ontological and epistemological explorations within a feminist framework. This chapter demonstrates how performative texts in social science research, such as the ones that make up later chapters of this dissertation, embody feminist practice. I focus on three dichotomies in particular, objectivity/subjectivity, theory/practice, and science/art, and locate performance within the *in-betweenness* of these polarities and as a means to move past them in order to make space for research that is grounded in women’s lived body experiences. I use philosophical hermeneutics to set up the relationships for the rest of the dissertation between study participants, myself as researcher, and you as reader.

Chapter Three is an autoethnographic article entitled “Sometimes I Just Run: Femininity Exercise Discourses and Autoethnographic Resistance.” It stands alone as an exploration of my own attempts to resist disciplinary rationalities related to health and fitness, while demonstrating the complexity of theorizing lived experience. It also serves as a reflexive exercise for both you and I. I make explicit my own lived experiences, prejudices, and foreunderstandings on the topic of women’s physical activity with honesty and openness, providing you, the reader, with the opportunity to examine your own horizon of understanding, encouraging a genuine dialogue between you and the text in the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter Four, “Playing Narratively with Women’s Life Histories of Physical Activity,” introduces the five participants of my study through the presentation of a holistic analysis of their life histories of physical activity. In service of feminist ethics, my participants’ life histories are preserved in their uniqueness, as I present the emergent plot of each woman’s life history in isolation. I ‘play’ with issues of interpretation and representation through the different forms of presentation that are possible within narrative inquiry.

Chapter Five is entitled, “Embodied Reclamation: Women’s Life Histories of Physical Activity.” This article presents the findings of the study this dissertation is built on. Part one describes the shared structure of each woman’s life history of physical activity, highlighting significant periods of time with implications for participation in sport and physical activity. From childhood to adulthood, the meaning of physical activity for the participants shifted from play to competition, weight loss, re-embodiment through physical activity, and imagined future roles of motherhood. Part two explains

emergent themes from across participants that underscore the numerous and gendered influences and barriers to physical activity for the participants, which include a perceived hierarchy of activities one should participate in, positive and negative influences from social relationships, and the triangle of exercise, thinness, and dieting. Approval from the Western University Research Ethics Board was granted for this study.

Chapter Six, “Fighting Off the Disembodied Bear,” is a performative piece that uses metaphor within a short story to present an overall picture of the findings from the previous chapters. Intermingling my own experiences with those of my participants, I use fiction to present my findings in a manner that is accessible, entertaining, and evocative. This chapter emphasizes the major finding that the intention or motivation behind an activity, such as running, influences whether it is empowering or disempowering, and whether or not it will likely be sustainable.

Chapter Seven offers a summary of emerging insights, conclusions, and reflections on the research. Quality criteria for assessing narrative inquiry are considered. I also offer recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER TWO

Fusions of Dichotomous Horizons:
Performative Social Science as Feminist Practice

Introduction: Where is She?

Falling deeper and deeper into the infinite spiral of internal dialogue within me, I am in search of a starting point, a place to begin. This is difficult because what I am going to write to you about – the conceptualization of performance as means of breaking down disempowering academic dichotomies – does not have a beginning or an end, rather ideas, theories, experiences, and concepts intertwine into a quadruple helix that comes back on itself in a never-ending circle. Nonetheless, a poem seems appropriate, and this poem in particular:

Where is she?

Activity/Passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Lagos/Pathos

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground – where steps are taken, holding – and dumping ground.

Man

Woman

(Cixious, 1986, p. 123)

This poem is significant to me for at least two reasons. While reading for a class I come across this Cixious and Clement quote (1986): “Women can break free from this circumscribing order [of masculinist language], which expresses itself above all in the binary oppositions we inherit – activity/passivity, sun/moon, culture/nature, day/night, speaking/writing, high/low, and so on” (p.63). These dichotomous phrases immediately take me back to the writing of my Master’s thesis (2011). Upon cracking open the hard cover copy that sits on my book case I find Cixious’ poem from above, which I used to aid in my demonstration of the sexist misrepresentation of women’s sport as all that men’s athletics is not, and of female athletes’ bodies as lesser versions of men’s bodies who are to be sexualized, infantilized, and subordinated. My thesis was an autoethnography whose inquiry began with my own lived experiences as a female athlete. What I wrote came from inside me, and what I knew of binary oppositions was not from a text book or journal article (for I was yet in my academic infancy), but from my own historical, social, and cultural situatedness. Firstly, then, I begin with this poem because it reflects my experience of coming across in academic writing that which I already know from lived experience, inciting the questions: Which knowledge is considered more valuable in academia, especially in feminist research, and what do I do with these two different ways of knowing?

Secondly, I begin with this poem because it speaks to me. It initiates a genuine dialogue between it and myself; it makes me step outside of my being and look back at where I stand, allowing me to locate myself while simultaneously assuring me that I am not alone. It recognizes my body as a knowledge mediator and teaches me in an artistic and embodied manner that is inconsistent with the traditional male/academic canon. The

poem's very existence in academia challenges the polarity and subsequent power differential between man and woman that is its object. This poem, then, does in part what I will do in this paper, which is to inquire into how performative social science challenges, through embodied representations of women's lives, dichotomous relationships in academia that marginalize women, both as subjects and objects of research.

I use the word 'performance' to describe numerous experimental forms of research, such as autoethnography and narratives of the self, fiction, poetry, prose, drama, plays, and visual art. In the following three sections I locate performance within the *in-betweenness* of three dichotomies in academia that I find especially disempowering for feminist researchers: objectivity/subjectivity, theory/practice, and science/art. In the first section I discuss the connection between objectivity/subjectivity and masculine/feminine and describe performance as a productive middle ground between objectivity and subjectivity rooted in the acknowledgment of one's situatedness and enacted through writing the self into the text. Next I explore the communicative boundaries of performance through Gadamer's hermeneutics in order to demonstrate its practicality, as feminist researchers act on their skepticism of the "privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson, 1994, p. 517) and instead venture into writing that can reach out from the page and touch people "where they live" (Bochner, 1997, p.423). This relationship is not without its issues, which I address in the third section where I discuss performance and its role in acknowledging the importance of representing and creating embodied knowledge.

Objectivity/Subjectivity

And Then God Created Science, But was it Good?

*Oh, the good ol' days, when we could see forever,
 high above this motley crew,
 where "hot air" kept our balloons aloft.
 Eternity and the world below us.
 Wasn't that grand?
 (Gergen, 2012, p.89)*

Whether we are conscious of it or not, all research begins at epistemological and ontological levels (Sprague, 2005), and it is here at the base of all research where the presence of dichotomies in scholarship is first presented, seen, felt as crushing. I cannot breathe already.

Objectivity
 Subjectivity

Realism
 Relativism

Masculine
 Feminine

These dichotomies are suffocating because of their totality and the consequences of such mutual exclusivity. I do not feel comfortable with the simplicity and cleanliness of such a framework. Bochner (1997) writes of "how tame the academic world is in comparison to the wilderness of lived experience" (p. 421). We dichotomize and categorize, we create charts and graphs, drawing hard lines between paradigms, epistemologies, and ontologies. But real life is messy and people are complex, and science conducted by humans and about humans should reflect this. We will get nowhere, but to a pleasing of our academic selves with such an all or nothing attitude.

According to Spender, "few, it appears, have questioned our polarization of reason/emotion, objectivity/subjectivity, reality/fantasy, hard data/soft data, and examined them for links with our polarization of male/female" (in Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 4). More than thirty years after Spender wrote these words I feel the male/female

dichotomy (and its relationship with masculinity/femininity) infused throughout all polarities that express the relationships between “the knower, the known, and the process of knowing” in scientific research (Sprague, 2005, p. 31). It would still seem that “within the dogma of science...reason, objectivity, reality – and male – occupy high status positions” (Spender, 1978, p.4 as cited in Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 29). Within the objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy exists the assumption that both positions maintain purity, and pure objectivity is distinguished as both a “desirable attribute and a male one” (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 30). Haraway (2003) describes the “unmarked positions of Man and White” as one of the “many nasty tones of the word ‘objectivity’” (p. 26).

Distanced claims of absolute Truth allow impartial researchers a “conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway, 2003, p. 26). This claim of objectivism is described by Haraway (2003) as the “god trick,” “knowledges ruled by phallogocentrism,” and “nostalgia for the presence of the one true Word” (p.27, 35); by Sprague (2005) as, “an Archimidean point outside the ongoing swim of the social world” (p. 33); by Harding (1991) as to “defy historical ‘gravity’ and fly off the earth, escaping entirely their [researchers’] historical location” (p. 145); by Richardson (1997) as “a Faustian bargain, the selling of one’s soul to the devil for earthly gains” (p. 48); I might add to this religious theme a vision of pews full of zombie scientists who respond to the Word together in one monotone voice, “Amen,” and in their claims to see everything from their ‘hot air’ balloons, in their claims to be able to ‘demystify all myths,’ they ironically make mystical themselves (Agger, 1998, p.85). *Poof! Researchers’ bodies disappear like magic, become untouchable, unreachable. And in related news, women are historically associated with the body.* How has objectivity, its missing body and subsequent

prevalence of the mind and cognition, come to be associated with maleness, and consequently, subjectivity associated with femaleness and the body?

Sheets-Johnstone's (2000) feminist phenomenological perspective advises that the male/female dichotomy is a natural opposition that is anchored in bodily experience, but that this oppositional pairing has a built-in possibility of "uneven polar valorization [with] far-reaching oppressive consequences" (p. 183). In our patriarchal society, oppositions are not viewed as extremes on either end of a continuum, but hierarchical antitheses. Grounding her reason in bodily experience, Sheets-Johnstone (2000) explains that men, lacking control of and at the mercy of *phallos*, project their unpredictability onto women in order to maintain control. This control is glorified through cultural distractions that inscribe negative attributes to women's bodies, for example, their Pre-Menstrual Symptoms as evidence of unpredictability. (Sheet-Johnstone, 2000). Irigaray describes the operation of uneven polar valorization much differently in her anti-essentialist theory of sameness, by which a symmetrical opposition allows the feminine to be deduced in light of what we know about the masculine (Crotty, 1998). From a subordinate position women are characterized as all that men are not, and thus, are made Other. By using the self as a "model by which to apprehend the Other," we are left with a masculine feminine, rather than a feminine feminine (Butler, 2001, p.63).

Whether performative social science is a representation of a masculine feminine or a feminine feminine is an important issue, but as Alcoff (2003) writes, "there is another issue that is at least as important, and that is to counter the overwhelming cultural denigration of everything and anything tainted with femininity as trivial, subjectivist, irrational, silly, weak, unnecessary, insignificant, and so on" (p. 234). Whether you agree

with Sheets-Johnstone's theory of the natural and bodily existence of dichotomies or Irigaray's conception of their social construction is irrelevant to understanding my point, which is that whether innate or social, the feminine opposition in any binary is placed hierarchically below the masculine (Stanley & Wise, 1983). In the case of academia, knowledges that are constructed in a manner external to that of traditionally 'objective' science – embodied and experiential knowing, collective stories, emotional and evocative writing, artistic expression – are sometimes, although less and less, marginalized to the periphery of knowledge construction where they will not be heard, projects will not be funded, colleagues not respected (See Denzin, 1997).

In my short academic career, I have often felt the disapproving gaze of 'objective' scientists, assuming under dichotomous separation that if I am not like them I must be the opposite. Yet, this judgmental relativism that I have perhaps been labeled with does not serve my purpose as a feminist researcher. According to Haraway (2003), "Relativism and totalization are both 'god tricks' promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully" (p. 30). They are different sides of the same coin that undermines our ability to be subjective beings *and* able to make legitimate knowledge claims – if we cannot know everything, we can know nothing (Harding, 1991). To locate ourselves in a judgmental relativism would be to allow our lived experiences to be dismissed on a basis of mere opinion; we need instead to be moving forward together in collective unity while still maintaining our acknowledgment of an unattainable truth and of the many and varied voices being represented.

Haraway (1994) writes of the body's role in our constructions of knowledge. As a constituent of nature, the body maintains vast liturgical possibilities; "its metaphoricity is

inescapable,” she says (p. 59). Focusing on optical metaphors, such as reflection and critical vision, which aims to question the taken-for-granted masculinity that pervades society as transparently normal, Haraway (1998) insists on the “embodied nature of all vision” (p. 26). We see from our bodies, and when we go into the ‘field’ we must look back at where we were standing; when we go into our own minds, we must locate ourselves to “name where we are and where we are not” (Haraway, 1998, p. 28). Situated knowledges that emerge from our historical, social, and material locations are rational and responsible. They do not claim universality, rather a partiality that allows for connections with others in the quest for understanding.

Writing from a more postmodern position, Richardson (1997) explains that not only can we locate ourselves within our research, but we can write ourselves into the text, recognizing both our cognitive and embodied roles as researchers. She writes, “My human body is present in every sentence I write and appears every time I break out in prose. Thankfully, there is no antidote” (Richardson, 1997, p. 49). Performance reunites the divided self, recognizing that as human beings researchers exist in the world we wish to learn about; we can draw on our emotions and life experiences to help us understand ourselves and others, and to write creatively, passionately, personally, and artistically (Bochner, 1997; Sparkes, 2003). One way of knowing is not valued over another; rather we can draw our formal education into that which we know from our Being-in-the-world in order to create writing and reading that is meaningful and from the heart (Ellis, 1999). Performance allows us to move “away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p.433). We can write of ourselves and of others

through stories that take many shapes and forms. Individual stories, when placed alongside the stories of others, have immense value in exposing larger social, historical and material patterns (Richardson, 1997). “Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals” (Haraway, 1998, p. 36), and collective stories can link women into a “collective consciousness” that overcomes the isolation of the powerless (Richardson, 1997, p. 58). Through consciousness-raising new stories can be created that break down the meta-narrative of women’s lives and open up new possibilities for living and the ways we feel about ourselves (Richardson, 1994).

Performance allows us to venture out into the unknown in order to discover where we are and where we are going. By locating ourselves within the living, breathing world and within our living, breathing bodies, we can make responsible knowledge claims that circumvent empirical universality and allow us to construct knowledge from and about women’s lives. Performance finds the sweet spot between objectivity and subjectivity by staking claim to the researcher’s location and presence within academic writing and by writing about the self and other women in ways that create new spaces, not only for women’s lives and their stories, but for new ways of knowing that resist epistemological subordination. Stories allow us to reveal meaning “without committing the error of defining it” (Arendt as cited in Bochner, 1997). How might we further conceptualize performance as a mode of understanding and transformation in feminist practice?

~~Theory/Practice~~
Hermeneutics?

*Too far from immediate reality;
 not practical enough;*

too speculative

-- definition of academic,

Webster's New World Dictionary, 1996

(in Bochner, 1997)

In reading Hans-Georg Gadamer's work, one is not likely to come across any mention of women or "other Others" (Code, 2003, p.2). He is certainly no feminist, and it is easy to imagine his silence on women as a reflection of his privileged position within knowledge construction. Yet, if we can look past this unfortunate omission, we might appreciate his transformative insights that defied the "consistent maleness of his putative interlocutors" (Code, 2003, p.2). Indeed, a definition of the traditional scientific method is given no space in *Truth and Method* (2000), which brings the empiricism and universality of said method into question (Weinsheimer, 1985). We might even conceptualize Gadamer's insights as feminine because they rely on such traditionally feminine qualities as openness, receptivity, a propensity to dialogue, and recognition of the interdependence between the relational beings that humans are (Alcoff, 2003).

Gadamer describes hermeneutics as "the art of understanding and of making something understood to someone else" (Hoffman, 2003, p.81). Understanding is the way that we enact our being-in-the-world; it comprises our relations to that which we can touch and see (Vasterling, 2003). We cannot understand as solitary entities, but rather as belonging to an in-betweenness amid oneself and another entity. Thus, understanding is dialectical and comes into being through the necessary and productive tension of this in-betweenness (Swayne Barthold, 2010). Truth, then, is not out there, existing in isolation, to be discovered. Truth is what we look toward while aware that we will never arrive there because of our finite understanding. While the dialectic of hermeneutics is infinitely

in the world, our dialogue with others is limited because of our effective historical consciousness, our horizons of understanding. We cannot, according to Gadamer (2000), apprehend truth from nowhere and everywhere. We are situated on a timeline that we ride throughout our lives with all that is behind us represented in tradition and informing our comprehension of immediate experience (Vasterling, 2003). This is a view from *somewhere*, a historical situatedness that influences the parameters of all knowledge-seeking – what is discussed, what is researched, and what becomes understood (Warnke, 2003; Hoffman, 2003). As a group that has been marginalized throughout the course of history, women are perhaps more inclined to acknowledge the significance of effective historical consciousness (Code, 2003). Our perceptions of ourselves and others’ perceptions of us are informed on a daily basis by a past whose filth we cannot seem to wash from our bodies.

This in-betweenness in academia is more often than not between a person and a text. Gadamer (1992a) writes, “What does it mean... that in all of antiquity no silent reading was done, and what does it mean that we no longer hear a real voice when reading?” (p.65). Today in academia the written word is highly valued. To be successful is to publish articles in peer reviewed journals or to publish a book that perhaps creates or furthers a paradigm shift. Knowledge does not spread today primarily through a material voice, as it once did in antiquity with crowds gathered around a Plato or an Aristotle. We do not often here of Heidegger’s talk, but rather of *Being and Time*, not of Gadamer’s speech, but of *Truth and Method*. In this transformation from speech to the written word, we have lost direct contact between speaker and audience. And it gets worse. The Internet and widespread use of social media has created a virtual reality, in which we are

simultaneously connected to and at an infinite distance from one another. We express ourselves in 140 characters or less, while Internet trolls spread hate from the safety of their parents' basements where no one will ever hold them accountable for their words.

Gadamer (2000) describes three different forms of dialogue or ways of reading a text, indicating that the text should be personified in order to emphasize its ability to actively participate in a dialogue with the reader. In an *I-someone* interaction, the *I* is the reader of the text and he or she takes on a positivistic stance towards the empirical generalizations that can be taken from the someone. In other words, meaning exists within the text, regardless of who reads it. The *I* maintains distance from the someone and speaks for it rather than with it, creating more of a monologue than a dialogue (Roberts Wright, 2003; Warnke, 2003). An *I-other* relation is also one-sided. In this case the *I* acknowledges that the other has its own truth claims, but he or she overrides such claims believing to understand the other better than the other understands itself. In this sense, meaning is constructed by the reader and all opinions are equally valuable – anything goes. We arrive once again at the objective/subjective dichotomy. Like Harding and Haraway, Gadamer rejects these ways of communicating; instead he chooses the third option – the *I-thou* relation. Here, the text expresses itself as a *thou*, rather than a *you*, to emphasize its power to transform the interpreter (Roberts Wright, 2003). The *thou* initiates the dialogue, draws the interpreter in to be challenged and to respond.

How do we create works that will hold their own in conversation once in print; that will partake equally in dialogue with the reader; that will invite the reader in and evoke a response? We must bring the text to life! Pelias describes performance as, “an opening, a location – a curtain drawn, a wooden floor washed with light, a window that

invites the voyeur, a circle in the square, a podium that stands before, an arena of play, passion, and purpose” (in Gergen & Gergen, 2012, p. 43). What an opportunity that lies before us, before those who float about on the periphery of knowledge construction – we are just waiting to step into the spotlight, to be heard, to teach, and to learn through connections with others. We can describe performative texts in a number of ways, but I have chosen ‘performance’ because it implies an *audience*. It immediately elicits questions regarding the relationship with the audience, such as: Who is intended to partake in this dialogue? Who is not able to attend? What meanings will be created? (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). These are not works fashioned for personal gain or as a means to a tenured, celebrated, monetarily rich end. There is no selling of the soul here, no Faustian bargains. Performance is created for others, and it is not only to be received by others, but to be *used* as a turn in conversation, as the question before the answer, and as an invitation to thoughts that bring us from where we are to the past, into the future, and back to the present again (Bochner & Ellis, 2003).

Performance as a means of inquiry and representation emerges from numerous academics – Richardson (1994, 1997, 2001), Ellis (1999, 2004, 2006, 2009), Bochner (1997), Gergen and Gergen (2012), and Sparkes (2002, 2003), to name a few – who, after decades of traditional research felt something missing in their lives and were finally forced to confront what could no longer be ignored – academic writing is boring. “Our work is underread,” says Bochner (1997), “undergraduates find many of our publications boring, graduate students say our scholarship is dry and inaccessible, seasoned scholars confess they don’t finish half of what they start reading, and the public hardly knows we exist” (p.433). It is this last point that the public hardly knows we exist, that makes me

wonder at our motivations, especially in critical research. “It seems foolish at best, and narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read and not making a difference to anything but the author’s career,” says Richardson (1994). And yet, it would appear I have entered a widespread educational system in which it is completely acceptable, even expected, for researchers to steal from ‘the field’ the lived experiences of others only to translate them into jargonistic and theoretical terms that are inaccessible to those they directly affect, but no matter, the research results will never make it out the door of the research institution and back into the lives of others anyways.

Richardson (1997) begs the question “Sociology for whom?” and even writes of being advised by her Ph.D. committee not to “waste [her] intelligence on people” (p. 21). Performance encourages a “sociology *of* the people and *for* the people” (Richardson, 1997, p. 22). The significance of performance “lies in [its] ability to create an intimate bond between teller and listener (Denzin, 1989, p. 189 in Denison & Markula, 2003). It links feminist theory to practice because it begins with women’s lives and opens up space for dialogue among those women and with our texts. Stories let us stew within them, linger in uncertainty, and ask questions that make the story our own. Thinking *with* a story in a genuine *I-thou* dialogue, we ask theory to be healing and liberatory, and theory becomes a social practice (Ellis, 1999; hooks, 1991). “There is no split between theory and story when theorizing is conceived as a social and communicative activity” (Bochner, 1997, p.435). According to Richardson (2001), writing is a feminist practice, and if we begin with the personal we can illustrate our humanity and connect with others on a meaningful level, even from behind the pages of a text.

Performative social science embodies hermeneutical philosophy because it reaches out into the lives of those people that are implicated in our academic discussions. It allows an understanding of shared experience, comforts those who need comforting, and allows those fighting for equality to feel more secure and supported in their cause. But, what about communicating with those who are not like us, who do not share our experiences, who may not have experienced sexism, whose bodies may have never been objectified but may have done the objectifying? In other words, how do we communicate with men?

Gadamer's dialogic relationship depends on mutual recognition and reciprocity, on openness to transformed horizons, and on the acknowledgment of our foreunderstandings – what Gadamer (2000) refers to as our prejudices. Within the hermeneutic circle, foreunderstanding can be described as “an anticipation of meaning that guides our understanding” (Vasterling, 2003, p.157). We do not enter into dialogue with the freshness and innocence of a newborn, for we are bound by traditions that help us give meaning to ideas, events, and people. We bring with us our historical location, our experiential baggage, and our prejudices that all line up in front of us to create our individual horizon of understanding. We are to make explicit our prejudices in order to differentiate between our individual horizon and the communal horizon that exists in the in-betweenness of *I* and *thou*. It is at this point that I begin to feel Othered, perhaps excluded from Gadamer's (hermeneutic) circle. He has built a solid foundation for understanding, but I am left teetering on the edge of this foundation, wondering if I can make the leap from theory to practice, from hermeneutical concepts to an actual exchange with someone of the ‘opposite’ sex. Can a dialogue between a man and my text really get

beyond the foreunderstanding phase? Can a man really make explicit his prejudices if he himself is not completely aware of them because they are so naturalized and socially embedded?

I am, of course, not alone in asking these questions. Vasterling (2003) explains that the most fundamental “condition of dialogue is the recognition of the other as equal” (p.171). Without this recognition, Gadamer’s hermeneutics becomes limited to the powerful while rendering mute the already marginalized voices of society (Pappas & Cowling, 2003). Gadamer acknowledges the issue of power in both the *I-someone* and *I-other* relations, but his requirements of openness and reciprocity that characterize the *I-thou* relation do not adequately address gendered power differentials (Vasterling, 2003). He himself states, “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked” (in Pappas & Cowling, 2003, p.223). Pappas and Cowling (2003) explain, “as a structure inherently dependent on a reciprocal relationship of listening and speaking, dialogue as the vehicle for understanding implicitly promises a ‘hearing’ for marginalized voices that cannot be fulfilled” (p.217). Women’s voices fall into the deep lacuna of philosophical discussions regarding phallogocentric prejudices (Pappas & Cowling, 2003).

There is something missing in this ‘practical philosophy’ that prevents it from being practical. Gadamer has forgotten something – my body, the very body through which I experience my being-in-the-world; the very body that undeniably evokes specific reactions and behaviours towards me; the very body that has played graffiti board for a thousand negatively inscribed words. Gadamer, in all his claims that knowledge is never unmediated, and in all his attention paid to one’s historical situatedness, failed to

recognize my body as the material evidence of my own historicity, my gendered experience, and my knowledge construction (Pappas & Cowling, 2003). He did not acknowledge my body's role in the understanding of my dialogue partners either, who, regarding me as Other, might find themselves gazing at me from such a distance that I could not scream loud enough for them to hear. Gadamer's hermeneutics may be feminine, but they are not feminist. From this theoretically advantaged position we must branch out into the critical realm if we are to fully challenge the theory/practice dichotomy that allows for the continuation of women's oppression.

~~Science/Art~~

Enter Stage Right: Embodied Knowing

*We only believe those thoughts which have been
conceived not in the brain but in the whole body.*

-- W. B. Yeats (in Cancienne & Snowber, 2003)

What we have lost in the shift from spoken to written word that Gadamer writes about, and what we are missing from the indirect exchange of thoughts through text, and maybe especially through virtual texts, is the human body. A text does not provide a human body to reinforce its concepts through gesticulation, nor does it provide a material voice whose intonation gives added meaning to the words themselves, and most basically, a person's physical presence to be seen and touched is lost in text. The missing body creates a distance between reader and subject, just as the missing body in Gadamer's hermeneutics perhaps allows for a distance between men and women from which men can gaze at women as Other. Even if we begin our research with women's lives, how can we help others understand a lifetime of gender implications? How can we

close this gap between reader and subject, between men and women, between theory and practice, between art and science, between mind and body? How can we draw men close to us that they may partake in genuine dialogue with us?

Described by Pappas and Cowling (2003) as an extension of Gadamer's hermeneutics that incorporates "gendered, political, and social aspects of understanding" (p. 206), critical hermeneutics acknowledges our situatedness, not only as historically affected, but also as affected by our materiality and feminine consciousness. It takes into account the embodied dimensions that exist in the physical world of conversation that may even define the limits of that conversation (Pappas & Cowling, 2003). According to Haraway (2003), we must privilege "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (p. 34). Our bodies are structured through our intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). They act as mediums through which we experience the lifeworld, and it is through our bodies that we know ourselves and others. To know, or to *conceive*, is to be born of the body (Woo Kim, 2001). All of our pain, sorrow, and hurt, as well as our love, happiness, and joy is wrapped up in our bodies that tell the stories of our lives. It is in and through our bodies that meaning is made and in order for others to understand us we must share this embodied knowledge. Yet, how can we possibly represent a woman's lived body experiences, maybe even our own experiences, with silent words that lay flat on a page?

We cannot. Words will never do justice to the intricacies of the human experience. Words will never fully express the complexity of emotion that is felt through the material self. Words will never convey the sensual lived body. But this does not mean

that we should not try, and it is through performative texts that we will get as close as possible to really *hearing* women's stories as if they are standing in front of us telling of their lives and letting us momentarily step inside their bodies to know what they know. "A poem, as Robert Frost articulates it, is 'the shortest emotional distance between two points' – the speaker and the reader" (Richardson, 1994, p. 521). It is an expression of everyone, of the possibilities of the world, and you, the reader, become the *I* – the writer and the object, simply through reading (Gadamer, 1992b). The poetic is not constrained by time or space. The verse becomes the whole and the whole is the verse, and we become a part of the poem, which is the world. You and I, here and there, once and now are together in an instant (Gadamer, 1992c).

With effective performative texts we do not read the words as facts that we cognitively understand through logical reasoning; we ingest the words and simply know, and this is done without any conscious effort. The words do not represent particulars or empirical statements – the words are meaningless on their own and immediately forgotten, but together they flow into us and give meaning through feeling. Poetic words at once lead us away from and back towards them (Gadamer, 1992b). Just as a coin does not hold its worth, a word does not hold its literal meaning; rather it creates an impression through its connection to other words. One does not think upon reading the poetic, one just *knows* without any intellectual operation. We know through our beating hearts, our sweating palms, the hairs raised on the back of our necks, the tears gathered in our eyes, our fingers rolled up into clenching fists, our stomachs fluttering and then extending for a deep breath, the goose bumps on our forearms, the hotness in our cheeks. We can know; we can 'get it.'

These are the words that, when used well, can open us up even without our permission, even if we refuse to hear. Good performative texts move passed one's cognitive thought and intellectual abilities and allow the mind, through its bodily connection, to feel the sensations of ideas one might never have imagined. What we can cognitively know is limited by our historical, social, and material situatedness – the social structures of our lives narrow our imaginations, but what we can know in our bodies is infinite. Freeing the imagination from the laws of association, performative texts allow us to detach ourselves from our foreunderstandings and move beyond our naturally determined intellectual abilities (Podro, 2003). The poetic does not rely on reflexive thought to be known – it is already in us as part of the living world (Silverman, 1976). These are the words that can overcome our prejudices while simultaneously allowing us to see them, maybe for the first time. Performative texts not only have the potential to bring women's embodied knowledges or material situatedness to life, but can create in the reader an embodied response, a “new sense organ” that surmounts their previous understanding (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 182). And when we can write about a phenomenon in a way that moves people, we can be sure that we know in our minds and our bodies what we write of; “it is through expression that we make it our own” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). We can be changed by and learn through the embodied act of writing, and we can initiate change in others.

Because of their embodied nature, performative texts often beg to be taken off the page and put out into the world through material bodies. Traditionally, science seems to place little importance on writing ability, despite it being our primary mode of communication and its implications for effectively conveying meaning. Science places

even less importance on our practice of direct person to person communication in classroom and conference settings. Here are spaces within and outside of academia where we can take advantage of the opportunity to use our material voices and our physical presence to perform. What are we doing, then, as I have often witnessed, speaking of others' experiences of racism, homelessness, terminal illness, rape, and genocide as if we are talking about cells, mathematical equations, or laboratory testing? Where is the performance, the poetry, the passion? Why should I care about your work or your cause if it appears that even you do not? Functioning under patriarchal beliefs, we do not value the material voice, associating it with the body, and then nature, and then woman (Fisher, 2010).

From a feminist perspective, here is an opportunity for women's material voices, often forgotten because of our emphasis on the metaphorical voice, to be heard, to be loud, to be funny, to be serious, to let out her corporeality and once again reveal the body as knowing (Gal, 1991, p. 177). Emphasizing the material voice is an act of resistance to the dominant cultural order of text over speech, semantic over vocal. Let us extend, where it is possible, our feminist motif of voice into vocality (Fisher, 2010). In the classroom, at academic conferences, and in our everyday interactions with people, let's tell our stories. Let's be animated, let's be emotional, let's tell others through our gesticulating presence and our tone that what we are saying is important and should not only be heard, but should be actively listened to and felt.

Let us stand at the podiums of our conferences without reliance on the written words of our slideshows behind us (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). Let's use our voices to make meaning and create impact, and when you perform your audience will come alive

and appreciate you talking *to* them and not *at* them. When your listeners share their own experiences in return, either during the question and comment period after your presentation or by seeking you out privately, you will know you have participated in a genuine dialogue. Performance, to make yourself vulnerable in a public place, can be a scary thing. Not all of us are good public speakers, but this is a skill, just like writing, that can be practiced and developed, and if we begin to see value in the spoken word then we can tell our stories in our own language and with our own voices. When we show our audiences that we are human, a room full of scientists will remember they are human too, and we need not be afraid of them.

Closing With an Opening

Performance is an opening that can be found between the patriarchal juxtaposing forces that create dichotomous thought. These hierarchical polarities – objectivity/subjectivity, theory/practice, and science/art – do not serve us well as feminist researchers. To think in terms of one or the other, and always one *over* the other, we lose our ability to communicate effectively the complexity and often conflicted meaning of everyday lived experience. Our bodies are what mark us as female and are prominent and consequential in our everyday human interaction. When we return to our bodies to impart an understanding of and appreciation for our struggles and accomplishments we let others feel what we have felt. Their minds expand to know their bodies and to know our bodies. We do this through art. Performance is an opportunity to connect with an audience that may have previously been excluded from conversation. It is an empty stage that is begging to be filled with voices, visions, and anything that will communicate something,

and to communicate is to partner with another – an audience. Philosophical hermeneutics is an intangible concept that needs a path into our concrete ways of Being, into our bodies. Performance is hermeneutics embodied, theory put into practice, art as scientific expression, a fusion of academic horizons that leads us to where women stand.

An open space

Waiting, waiting

Fill her up

Sound, colour

Audience

A need for space

Yearning, longing

Connect with me

Feeling, tingling

Body

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CHAPTER THREE

Sometime I Just Run: Femininity Exercise Discourses and Autoethnographic Resistance

Introduction

I used to be an athlete. When I stopped competing and was forced to look beyond my narrow vision of physical activity as sport training, my eyes were opened to what I experienced as the oppressive world of women's exercise. I slowly backed away from the health and beauty messages by which I felt bombarded for fear they might overcome me. I backed into my sedentary corner where I stayed for a long while. My limp body laid motionless like a master-less marionette, while I tried to figure out who I would become, how my body might absorb and repel varying exercise discourses, and what reason I would finally land on for returning to physical activity.

The previous chapter explored the ways performative social science can be considered feminist practice because it subverts hegemonic academia. This chapter uses autoethnography, a form of performative social science, as methodology to explore the ways gender, specifically femininity, is practiced, performed, and resisted in women's physical activity. I situate my narratives within a health promotion framework that contests neoliberal rationalities, leaning on Foucault's concepts of surveillance, discipline, and power/knowledge to unpack my troubled interactions with dominant women's exercise discourses. Problematizing resistance under Foucault, I turn to existential phenomenology, acknowledging the opposing underlying philosophies of Foucault and phenomenology, as I describe what is to me, a more rewarding form of feminist resistance. In examining the ways my experiences move with *and* against these

opposing theoretical paradigms, I highlight the often conflicting complexity of lived experience and of meaning-making through academic theorizing, furthering my quest begun in Chapter Two to blur lines and break the academic ‘rules.’

The ‘causes of the causes’

A gap exists within the field of health promotion between the values it espouses – equity and social justice, empowerment, holistic health, a full range of determinants, social participation, an emphasis on the role of environments on influencing behaviour (Poland, 2007) – and its practices, which often function as neoliberal rationalities that aim to educate the public regarding the risks of physical inactivity, increasing individual autonomy and decreasing the state’s responsibility for its population (Ayo, 2012; Raphael, 2002). Lifestyle approaches, born of a penchant for risk reduction, are prevalent in North America despite their enduring failure to make meaningful and sustained improvements in health outcomes (Poland, 2007). There is a call to realign health promotion with its values through a critical engagement with issues of power and marginalization (Raphael, 2002). This realignment relies on recognition of the social determinants of health (SDH) or the “causes of the causes” (Marmot, 2005, p. 1102), and a theoretical interrogation of how these causes are experienced (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). If sedentary behaviour is causing illness among Canadians, what is causing the sedentary behaviour?

SDH describe the unequal distribution of economic and societal factors that influence the overall health of individuals, communities, and nations (Raphael, 2004; 2011). They also regulate “the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and

cope with the environment” (Raphael, 2004, p. 1). Before health promoters attempt to engage effectively with a sedentary population, it makes sense that we first understand how the SDH, including gender, work to produce these lifestyle behaviours.

Gender and autoethnography

Gender is a SDH because societal values, expectations, and norms of masculinity and femininity lead to health disparities between men and women. The gender gap in health is universal due to the “different socially sanctioned options, opportunities, and realities men and women face” (Phillips, 2011, p. 16). According to Bryant (2009), research has not adequately investigated how gender and its relationship to other SDH work to increase poorer health outcomes for women. Research on the SDH is largely epidemiological. Although it refers to gender, its failure to consider the political and social structures that shape gender, which in turn influences behaviour and experience, the research is really examining differences between sexes – not gender. It provides necessary statistical reassurance, through the sex disaggregation of data, that relationships exist between gender and health, but it does not deconstruct the *nature* of those relationships (Denton & Walters 1999). There is a call for research that makes use of non-traditional and qualitative research methodologies and methods to examine the performance of gender and the meaning of its relationship to health and health behaviours (Broom & Warin, 2011; Phillips, 2011).

Autoethnography is one of the methodologies that acknowledge the lived realities of women’s lives. Through storied, evocative, and ‘messy’ texts, autoethnography draws on the personal to expose and critique the political (Richardson 2001; Denzin 1997; Ellis 2004). Because of its emphasis on embodied participation, autoethnography has been

used to explore varied cultural and gendered experiences of health and illness, such as hysterectomies and breast cancer (Davis 2009; Davis & Warren-Findlow 2011; Ellis 1999), acute illness and pain (Ettorre 2005; Neville-Jan 2003), caretaking, death and dying, and health practitioners' practices (Malthouse 2011; Schneider 2005; Williams 2012; Hocker 2011; Ellis 1995; Bochner 1997), pregnancy (Lahman 2008; Sheach Leith 2009), and sport and physical activity (Sparkes 2002, Popovic 2012; McParland 2013; Axelsen 2009; Zanker & Gard 2008). These works blur the lines between self and culture, subject and object, and mind and body to create and expose a multiplicity of overlapping layers of consciousness and experience. The authors write, as I do, of personal experience that is not meant as a representation of other women, but as a single story that is socially, materially, and historically situated, and when placed alongside the collective stories of others is powerful, thought-provoking, and meant to stimulate an emotional response (Richardson 1997).

The retired female athlete is a unique station from which to write. While researchers have examined the psychological impact of retirement on competitive athletes and the physical ramifications of identity loss (See, Cosh, Cabbe, & LeCouteur, 2013; Fuller, 2014; Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013; Kuettel, Boyle, & Schmid, 2017; Lally, 2007; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Martin, Fogarty, & Albion, 2014; Sparkes, 1998; Webb, 1998), I am unaware of any current research that situates athlete retirement and subsequent physical (in)activity from a SDH perspective, one that specifically examines the impact of gendered exercise discourses on physical activity. Booth and Roberts (2008) use the retired athlete as metaphor for our physical activity ancestry and its decline towards a sedentary population, thereby suggesting that the study of elite athletes,

post retirement and with the training stimulus removed, demonstrates physiological changes that are detrimental to one's health and that can be compared to shifts in our population's gene expression – from vigorously physically active while hunting and gathering to technologically-induced sedentariness leading to declining aerobic capacity and skeletal muscle. According to Booth and Roberts (2008), examining retired athletes, who rarely maintain their physical activity levels from their competitive careers, may shed some light on the importance of exercise in our population's aptitude regarding aerobic capacity and skeletal muscle strength, both of which are associated with lower incidences of many chronic diseases. While this chapter does not explore my own biochemical makeup, it takes a parallel, qualitative path in exploring how one retired athlete, a female, experiences loss of physical capacity post retirement, and how this experience is influenced by the social world – in this case, gender – to produce or not produce exercise behaviours that might help to manage potential chronic illness.

As a track and field heptathlete, I was not immune to the sexualization, objectification, and infantilization of female athletes, which I have written about elsewhere (McParland, 2013), but the athlete 'bubble' in which I lived somehow protected me from the discursive technologies that shape women's exercise within the general population of Canadians. As an athlete, I was motivated to move my body by visions of standing atop a podium, achieving a new personal best performance, and the pure delight of being fast, strong, and physically capable. Discourses of consumerism, health-ism, and ideal beauty that work to discipline many women through exercise flew beneath my radar. The link between physical activity, health, and physical appearance

was absent from my consciousness, as the privilege of my toned, tall, slim, white, able body allowed me to focus on its function, rather than my body's appearance.

Deveux (1996) states that many women are unaware of discursive technologies that may be acting upon them because they are so socially embedded. It seems fair to state that many women's constructions of exercise are a reflection of a lifelong interaction with patriarchal culture that elevates women's to-be-looked-at-ness above all else. My consciousness of these normalizing technologies occurred rather abruptly and later in life upon the bursting of my athletic 'bubble,' allowing me to see, with fresh eyes, just how ubiquitous the connection between exercise, health, and beauty really is. This autoethnography explores my struggle with this connection and the ways I continue to resist it. I have the skills, knowledge, and access to physical activity, but an overworked body that regularly flirts with disability. I possess a shifting identity, ready to absorb something new, but wanting to ward off much of what is coming at me – from television screens, magazine covers, billboards, and everyday chatter with friends.

My narratives challenge the distanced and impartial approach of traditional social science, and instead acknowledge my voice as valuable in being situated in the everydayness of life, and in my body, which holds within it a history of complex inscriptions (Harding, 1991; Denison & Markula, 2003; Sparkes, 2002; Richardson, 1997; Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 2004). I invite readers into my story, perhaps to feel something new, or perhaps to feel something very familiar, to be comforted by a common understanding, and to begin or continue a dialogue with others and Others. In a move to link theory to practice, I go beyond a discourse analysis to examine not only what women's exercise discourses are and mean, but how I interact with them on a daily basis.

My story is unique, and it is shared in an effort to open up space for women to reflect on and critically examine their own experiences of exercise, that we may continue to deconstruct the grand narrative of women, discursively re-shape women's exercise, and change the stories of our bodies (Richardson, 1997; Haraway, 2003; Vertinsky, 2006).

Shock to the Body: Discursive Technologies and a Retired Athlete

I sit for hours on end, sinking deeper and deeper into the cushions of my couch. The lights from the television flicker in my glazed over eyes. I'm not watching – I'm thinking about dusting off my running shoes and going for a run. The problem is, that's all I ever do now – I think about it, but I can't seem to get off this ugly, green couch. For the first time in my life I have become what I once believed impossible.

I am sedentary.

The weight of the word leaves a heaviness in my gut, its burden fed by two decades of athletic self-discipline that was constantly celebrated with high fives, medals hung around my taut neck, photo albums filled by proud parents, with newspaper clippings on the fridge, teammates chanting my name as I raced around the track. Perhaps caused by more than the loss of social offerings afforded athletes, the burden of 'sedentary' rests uncomfortably in my atrophying muscles. Longing for movement, they shrink and soften along with my identity.

Sport, specifically track and field, was who I was. It was all I was, my low self-complexity evident in my cognitive arrangement of Self with 'athlete' front and center – a ticking mental health time bomb, ready to go off upon retirement. After two decades of Being through athletics, I have, as Sparkes (1998) describes, descended from the

extraordinary (if only in my own mind) to the “mundane world of ordinariness” (p. 644). I flounder, searching for purpose and reason, and the first time my leg muscles fail to allow me to take the stairs three at a time, I am brought to stillness.

Looking down at my legs,

What the hell was that?

My traitorous limbs are weak; they are no longer predictably supple and alert from the regimented training I relied on for so long. I feel incomplete, as my body floats outside of my Self, appearing to me through its dysfunction – the ‘dysappearing body’ (Sparkes, 1998). I feel less safe as I walk home at night, my keys clutched between white knuckles, ready to scratch his eyes out. I can no longer outrun him, my potential attacker. This new, soft body makes me vulnerable, as I realize my confidence in all parts of my life was built upon the rickety skeleton of physical ability. I am vulnerable to a physical attack, and I am also vulnerable to normalizing discourses surrounding the body.

Still on my ugly green couch, the show I am watching cuts to commercial and I instinctively throw up my protective shield, ready to be stabbed repeatedly with you-are-not-good-enough messages. The commercials provide the problem and the solution, as ‘perfect’ women flash across the screen to tell me that I am not pretty enough, my hair not shiny enough, my skin not smooth enough, my teeth not white enough, my eyelashes not long enough, my ass not tight enough, enough, enough. ENOUGH!

My descent into the “mundane world of ordinariness” (Sparkes, 1998) introduces me to what Foucault (1980) refers to as ‘regimes of truth’ that are novel to me. My literally soft body perhaps makes me metaphorically more docile, as I attempt to deal with competing exercise discourses and create new subjectivities for myself. Foucault

(1982) states, “subjects are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized’ (p. 221). I feel myself being pulled apart, quartered by normalizing expectations of the female body and its movement. I long for the burning sensation in my legs – movement for movement’s sake, and these feelings compete with disempowering discourses related to health-ism and the conflation of health with a sexually attractive appearance. I am shocked by the number of times throughout the day I am assaulted by dominant women’s exercise discourses that I had paid no attention to as an athlete, but now struggle to keep at arm’s length. The disembodied disciplinarian, referred to by Duncan (1994), breathes hot air down my neck, making we wish I could jump out of my body – a body I used to love because of its strength, speed, and ability. How will I resist the disciplinarian?

Foucault (1997) describes governmentality as “understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself” (p. 82). Governmentality, then, goes beyond the state and other formal institutions, such as schools, religions, and workplaces, and into individual governance of self and others (Dean 1994). It is ‘the conduct of conduct,’ the creation of ideologies through dominant discourses that tell us how to think about the world around us (Guthman & Dupuis 2006, 442). These technologies of governmentality construct the possible field of actions for others and ourselves by spreading notions of ‘normal’ (Foucault, 1982). Contemporary exercise discourses act as discursive technologies through both morally-laden messages regarding ‘normal’ behaviour and what it means to

be a responsible citizen and a good human being, and through aesthetic messages that define what an acceptable appearance looks like (Dean 1994; Guthman & DuPuis 2006).

Both men and women are governed by health promotion discourses that function under neo-liberal rationalities and attempt to manage risk behaviour to minimize the economic role of the state (Ayo 2012). Health becomes linked to appearance for both men and women through obesity discourses that equate good health to thinness (Guthman and Dupuis 2006). The resultant fear of fat becomes disciplinary, as people either attempt to conform to a norm they may be incapable of attaining or face the shame and blame of being deviant (Bordo 1993). Disciplinary power creates ‘docile’ bodies that are worked on and practiced towards normative subjectivities (Foucault, 1991). Dominant discourses can be characterized as social control mechanisms that are so embedded in society they become taken-for-granted and can go unnoticed (Eskes, Duncan, & Miller 1998).

Women are particularly oppressed by norms of thinness because of “heterosexual, male-defined beauty” and can be considered more “docile, malleable and impressionable than the masculine body” (Eskes, et al., 1998, p. 317; Cole, 1993, p. 87). Through technologies of femininity women’s appearances are emphasized as paramount in settling on their worth as human beings through “knowledges, practices, and strategies that manufacture and normalize the feminine body: those techniques, actions, and structures deployed to sculpt, fashion, and secure bodily shapes, gestures, and adornments that are recognizably female” (Cole, 1993, p. 87). As a result of these discourses, the female body has become grounds for constant criticism and scrutiny from others and the self (Markula, 1995). Women are subject to daily regimes of creating the ideal body – the

slim, hard, slightly toned body (Cole, 1993). They are encouraged to work on their ‘trouble spots’ in order to become a ‘perfect size 6’ (Markula, 1995; Eskes, et al., 1998).

As I struggle to find new meaning in physical activity beyond sport training and competition, I wonder if the moral constitution of living a good life relies on working out at GoodLife, Canada’s largest health club company with over 365 locations across the country (Goodlife, 2017). I’m not alone – one in every 28 Canadians is a GoodLife member (GoodLife, 2017)

I walk into a GoodLife Fitness gym with trepidation. It’s not my loss of muscle and novel sense of weakness that makes me uneasy about being here. My lingering athlete persona lets me think that I belong. Rather, it’s the commercial vibe that makes me anxious. What are they selling? Gym memberships? Health? Happiness? Hot bodies? Do I need these people, this place? Can I buy into their ideals? And at what cost?

“Hi!” the young woman behind the counter interrupts my thoughts. “How are you today?” she asks in a high-pitched voice with a smile. Her peppiness annoys me for some reason. “Hi, I’m thinking about getting a membership,” I say in a drawn out tone that underscores my uncertainty. “Awesome! Well, I’m Dyl, and if you want to grab a seat over there I can get you all set up!” “Great. Thanks,” I respond with little enthusiasm.

I expect some forms and information about costs – instead I get an interview. “So what kind of physical activity are you currently involved in?” Shit. Does sitting on the couch count? I avoid the truth of my inactivity with “I used to run track.” Unprepared to ward off this surprising, shame-inducing investigation into my life, I flush red with guilt. I see myself through the eyes of the fitness-enforcer, and I’m about to start making excuses

for what I assume she perceives as laziness when she replies, “Awesome! So what are your fitness goals?” My fitness goals? My guilt is immediately replaced by anger, as I recognize the disempowering discursive technologies of women’s exercise at work. Who does this girl think she is? What is this power dynamic I am sensing? Why does she care what my goals are and why is she acting like some personal training course makes her an expert on my experience? Does she think she’s going to give me advice on fitness? Listen, Dyl...I want to lean in close and list off my athletic achievements along with my numerous health related degrees. I am deeply offended by the implication that there is some working relationship between us – that I need help and she’s going to provide it. But mostly I am offended by the assumption that I have or should have goals regarding my fitness, that I am not good enough as I am, that I do not meet this stranger’s standards, that I need to change or progress in some measurable way, that I need something to work towards in order to be here.

Goals? I don’t have any that are associated with this place. But I know this is not an acceptable answer in this society where we are always moving forward, progressing, everything is a means to an end, never just an experience. I know what I am supposed to say: I want to lose weight. No, that doesn’t work. I am already a bean pole. I want to run a marathon. One day, yes, but not as some form of motivation to get me into the gym. I want to get stronger. Yes, but this will be a by-product of my time in the gym, not something I need to focus on. I want to be healthy. Sure I do, but this has never been a reason for me to exercise, rather a positive side-effect. Dyl waits for me to respond. “Oh. Ummm...” I pick the answer that seems the least ridiculous, “I just want to be stronger.” “Awesome!” Dyl replies. Everything is awesome. She continues asking me questions

whose answers are none of her business. At the end of the interview, rather than signing up, I say, "Thanks. I'm going to think about it," and I leave. She lets me keep the book and Cd-rom written by David Patchell-Evans, the creator of GoodLife Fitness. Both are full of wonderful advice about how I should live my life and why I should exercise. Both make a nice clunk sound as they land in my garbage.

Weeks later I come crawling back to Dyl. As it turns out, I do need this place. It has weights and equipment that I can't afford, and it's too cold to exercise outside. Dyl doesn't seem to recognize me despite her deep interest in my healthy future from our previous meeting. This time, when she asks me about my fitness goals I'm prepared. "I don't have any fitness goals," I proudly announce, "I just like to work out." Dyl isn't sure what to make of this, "Oh...okay... [long pause, wheels turning, almost there]... Awesome! What kind of physical activity are you currently involved in?" I begin again with "Well, I used to run track," and add, "Now I coach varsity athletes, so I do some workouts with them." I don't do workouts with my athletes – that was a lie, but it has a purpose. "Awesome!" Dyl replies, and then she hesitates for a moment. She begins, "So you're pretty experienced with working out..." "Yes," I answer with a smile, knowing I have successfully shifted this power dynamic in my favour. She continues in a self-conscious manner, "So I'm probably not going to be able to give you any advice or anything, but we have to do this interview as protocol, or whatever." "No problem," I say, and continue responding with 'abnormal' answers. Sorry, Dyl.

Finally I can begin my workout, but I'm not yet clear of being told why I'm supposed to be here and how I should feel. In the closed off women's section of the gym there are rows upon rows of cardio machines, a smaller number of fixed weight machines

(those designed for one specific exercise that guide your body in the proper direction – one might say they target your ‘trouble spots’), no rack, no bars, no weight plates. The overrepresentation of cardio versus weight training equipment tells me I’m supposed to be here to lose weight. As I run on the treadmill the burned calorie counter on its dashboard glares at me with a disapproving eye. Tisk, tisk, it says, you shouldn’t have had that piece of cake. I avert my eyes from it just before it completely sucks from me the joy of running. I don’t care about calories! The scale in the change room further deflates me. The televisions lining the walls in front of the cardio machines tell me that running or biking is something I need to be distracted from in order to continue doing. The other walls lined with floor to ceiling mirrors tell me I’m here to improve my appearance. I see my reflection staring back at me, reminding me that I can’t escape it. I see other women’s reflections too, and they see me, but we do not speak; we only look at each other and then back at ourselves, always comparing, judging, wishing, hating. And while I came here to feel the strength of my body moving through space, it takes all of my energy to stop myself from looking unhappily inward.

A poster reads, “Every BODY is welcome here.” Well that’s encouraging, I think, until I notice the before and after photos of a woman posted right beside it. The sign should read, “Every BODY is welcome here...as long as your goal is to transform into skinny/attractive/fit/sexy/acceptable/normal” (these words seem synonymous here, so any one of them would work). I question the existence of a women’s only section in the first place. It’s nice to run without feeling the objectifying male gaze, and I am welcome to work out in the co-ed section, but should I really be forced to choose between objectification and segregation? Rather than removing the objectifying male gaze, they

have simply removed the women. If this truly were a place for every body, a women's only section would not be necessary. Along with my gym membership I am being sold a number of contradictory messages. This is a business, and my body is the site of exchange. I am not sold on this company's exercise ideals. I hope I never will be.

These narratives that take place on the couch and in a commercial gym express my sense of feeling trapped by social 'norms' that go against the grain of my very being; they make explicit the struggles I face in negotiating dominant discourses that affect power over me. I cannot deny that what has come out of my writing is a sense of being acted upon, controlled, governed. My narratives feel like a very direct extension of Foucault's theory of governmentality. This personal connection to a theory is reassuring – I often question the legitimacy of analyzing women's lived experiences via theories created by men who are located at the center of knowledge construction, but perhaps isolated from the living and breathing world of those who are marginalized. I wonder if my connection to Foucault exists because as a gay man, he also lived outside of the 'norm.'

One of the advantages of autoethnography is the ability to connect my personal experiences within the social world to my philosophical and theoretical knowledge within academia; I am no longer a divided self (Bochner, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2003). As the researcher and the researched I can choose the theoretical lens that best suits my deconstruction of the social phenomenon I am examining. In this case, Foucault's theory of governmentality makes me nod my head and say, "Yes, this is what I'm talking about."

When Dyl asks me about my fitness goals I know the answers she is expecting and what I am ‘supposed’ to say because I have learned through discursive technologies the ‘normal’ reasons women exercise. *Lose weight. Look good. It’s almost bathing suit season.* These words are not even mine, but they would so easily slide from my tongue if I let them. It takes a long pause for me to wade through the readily available fat-stigmatizing discourses and find my own answer, and I’m not always successful.

Foucault and Faux Freedom

Foucault has been criticized for the totality of his theory of governmentality that focuses on technologies of domination and seemingly does not provide a ‘way out’ for disempowered groups, in this case women (Markula, 2003; Deveux, 1996). Others maintain that his later work, which focuses on the subjectivity of the self and the ‘technology of the self’ is an agentic approach that reveals a more optimistic vision of re-conceptualizing the self through resistance (Heyes, 2006; Lloyd, 1996). Foucault (1988) himself states, “Perhaps I’ve insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself in the technology of self” (p. 19). Foucault (1988) describes technologies of the self as practices that “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (p. 18).

If technologies of domination act upon me in a disciplinary fashion, then technologies of the self lead to self-transformation through critical engagement with dominant discourses. Foucault (1985) suggests focusing on an ethical self-care, rather than favouring contemporary morality, reinforced by political, economic, and social structures, as a guiding principle. His concept of ethical self-care draws on ancient Greek society, in which morality was based in a more autonomic existence toward “a stylization of attitudes and an aesthetics of existence” – living a beautiful life (Foucault 1985, p. 92). This life consisted of practices of self-care, such as letter writing, active self-examination, and dream analysis, always implying an ethical relationship with others through the non-dominant administration of power (Foucault, 1985).

The ways that I interact with dominant discourses can be referred to as an aesthetic self-stylization. This relationship between subjectivities and dimensions of knowledge and power is characterized as ‘the double’ – the ‘folding’ in or interiorization of the outside (Markula, 2003). According to Foucault, it is *how* I choose to fold in the outside that represents technologies of the self. Clearly, possessing some critical self-awareness is necessary for any form of resistance (Lloyd, 1996). I have had the uncommon privilege of being educated in a critical feminist paradigm. Because I am aware of the governmental rationalities of dominant discourses, I can attempt to resist them. What about those women who have not yet, and may not ever, come to fully appreciate the patriarchal norms acting on their bodies? Some women “internalize the feminine ideal so profoundly that they lack the critical distance necessary to contest it” (Deveux, 1996). Even with my education I am not always successful at shielding myself from the push to be superficial, self-loathing, unsure, and lacking self-confidence.

When I am able to subvert contemporary discourses, I create my own empowering subjectivity. I run. I lift. I sweat. I do it because it feels good. The women around me also run. They lift. They sweat. What brings them to the gym, I wonder, as I see their reflections in the inescapable mirrors? There can be multiple meanings of a single activity. According to Foucault (1978), power is everywhere and nowhere; it cannot be “acquired, seized, or shared” (p. 94); therefore, no one activity can be oppressive or empowering – it is a person’s thoughts about that activity that make it what it is. This is precisely the reason that housework might be as empowering as pushing your physical limits on the treadmill or that pushing your physical limits on the treadmill might be as disempowering as housework. In her discussion of female exercise as a transgressive activity, Markula (2003) states, “feminists need to ask women to articulate [their critical self-awareness],” rather than assuming an activity is either oppressive or transgressive (p. 104). In a later study (2004), she does this by asking leaders of a Hybrid fitness class to describe the meaning behind the class, which offers a mixture of mindful fitness practices, such as yoga, pilates, strength training, and Tai Chi. I can almost sense Markula sitting opposite the interviewees, crossing her fingers behind her back, hoping above all hopes to hear that these fitness ‘experts’ recognize the transgressive potential of their teachings. They do not.

What chance is there for change then? How can I make a political statement and change dominant discursive practices through my actions if I am participating in the very same activity as women who are self-loathingly trying to alter their appearances to meet male-defined beauty? How can I create a public impact by provoking confusion about dominant femininity discourses? How do I practice a care for others as part of my ethical

self-care? At the end of her paper regarding her Hybrid fitness study, Markula (2004) states, “Although I perhaps practiced self-care by creating an aesthetic of better posture, I did not instigate any change in the fitness discourse despite my relative power position. I continue to be troubled by my own (non-)engagement with the possibilities offered by the technologies of the self” (p. 320).

As an authority on the discursive technologies that surround women’s bodies who was participating in a fitness class for her ethnographic study, perhaps this was a missed opportunity for Markula to instigate a critique of dominant discourses by others. Sure, she could have explained governmentality, at least in part, during her interviews. Yet, Foucault was not thinking of academic studies and the controlled environment of an interview setting when he conceptualized technologies of the self. How do I, in my everyday settings, such as the gym, instigate a critical eye in others? This is no easy task when we consider the interactions between women in fitness gyms. We do not speak to each other – we only stare and compare (Cole, 1993). Perhaps I could preach from the top of my step-up box. I might sport a T-shirt that says, “Ask me about Foucault.” Maybe between squat repetitions I could yell out, “I like myself! I like myself! I like myself!”

I can transform myself to exhaustion, but my ability to change disciplinary discourses is limited. Is the transformation of the self really enough? Am I really free if I remain constantly bombarded by “How do you lift so much?” and “Can I give you some pointers on your technique?” and “You should smile more”? Am I free if forced to interact with discourses that label me as deviant when I do not conform; if I am socially punished for spreading my dominant discourse slander? *Why do you have to be so critical? Stop over-thinking everything. It’s just a commercial, calm down. Stop being so*

negative. And have I transformed into all that I could be if such disciplinary discourses have drastically narrowed my path and my imagination about myself through taken-for-granted assumptions about women and their roles in society? I am left to deal continuously with offensive discourses and the equally offensive actions of others that result from those discourses. It is so exhausting that I sometimes try and remember what it was like before I knew what I know, and I wonder momentarily if maybe ignorance is bliss. Is this freedom? Is this what exercise means to me?

Quieting the Discursive Voices: Writing from the Inside-Out

I run

Sometimes when I run I leave my watch at home.

What's that? No watch?! That's outrageous! How will you know how long you ran for, how good a person you are? How will you know when you can stop? How will you know how much dessert you deserve after your dinner of celery sticks dipped in protein powder? That's what you eat, right? No? You eat real food? Doesn't that make you feel bad?

Sometimes I leave my iPod at home too.

What? No music? What will distract you from the awful pain of running? What will help you pass the time?

Sometimes I just run. The sound of my controlled breath released to the beat of my heart is all the music I need. Sweat rolls off of my skin, and I shake my fists into free and loose fingers. My shoulders let go, let go, let go with every stride. I am whole. I am

strong. I am present. My knees come up a little higher, feet come down a little faster, hamstrings burn a little hotter. I feel it all, and it becomes me. Sometimes I just run.

I lift

The bar digs into the rough callouses on the palms of my hands as my fingers wrap around it. *Let's go!* my inner voice shouts, as I duck my head under the bar and settle it on my shoulders. The 45s clatter together as I lift the bar off its rack and take a measured step backwards. In the mirror in front of me my eyes zero in where my belly button lies beneath my T-shirt; everything else blurs out of focus. I cannot see, I only feel. I lower my backside slowly towards the ground, pausing for an instant in my squat, while the kinetic energy gathers in preparation within my extended hamstrings. Pushing my heels into the ground ignites my glutes, and I force them to push through my hips. I thrust past the inertia, rising just a couple of inches, and I know I've got this. Power flies out of me in every direction until I feel the bar bounce on my shoulders. I'm standing, and I'm so fucking strong!

I sweat

When no one is watching, I sneak my old javelin out of the equipment room at the track and bring it down to the field. All alone, I use the javelin as my stretching partner, allowing it to loosen my chronically injured shoulder as I twist it around my bending body like a samurai with his sword. As I pull the javelin through my grip for the first time, it transforms into a pointed spear, the sun glinting off its sharp edges as it cuts through the air in a devastating arc. It lands not on the manicured lawn of an outdoor recreational facility, but in the tall grass of a pre-historic valley only few have laid eyes on. My spandex and lycra become animal fur. I feel the sun beat down on my skin, smell

the dirt and grass beneath my naked feet. I keep the weight of my upper body back as I sidestep forward, gaining speed. Cross-over, cross-over. Stop, plant, streeeeetch. My hips turn forwards as my arm reaches straight out behind me in the opposite direction. I become a human slingshot that hurls my spear at lightning speed towards the mammoth that will feed and clothe my entire clan for the winter months. My spear falls short, but I smile at my game, wondering what people would think if they knew I came down to the field to play pretend with my javelin, and also wondering what the world would be like if it wasn't just children who played. I chase after my javelin, already excited about what the next throw will bring. Breathing quickly after my sprint, I feel like the sun showed up just for me, to radiate over this uncomplicated moment. Sweat rolls down the curve of my spine and soaks into the waist of my shorts.

Clean-Cut Theories and the Messiness of Life

These stories do not feel the same as the narratives at the beginning of this paper. I am not being acted upon, governed, crushed; rather, I am at the center of my Being and all things flow from me. I am powerful. This is not an interiorization of that which surrounds me, but a sending out of myself. It *feels* like existential phenomenology. And *voila!* Exercise can be empowering. But let's stop with the use of such a dirty word – this is not exercise; it's physical activity. There are no meanings, explanations – just feeling. This is me being in my body, connecting to the lifeworld through my inter-corporeality. This is freedom, a deep breath and long exhale after suffocation. I feel the tension releasing from my body even as I write. It runs out of my fingertips and out of the Foucauldian trap I was in only moments ago.

Sometimes I just run. In moments of physical activity – running down the path, pressing the weighted bar away from my chest, moving to music on a dance floor – I am existing through my body. There are no discourses to engage with – I left them at home. They are not a part of my consciousness and I am at peace within my living, breathing self. In these moments, my body is not a dumping ground for discursive technologies. I resist being acted upon in the first place; I resist normative femininity as passive, absorbing, welcoming, and being for others through their wants and needs. Rather than existing for some future self, I exist in the moment. Perhaps I also exist in past selves – my athlete self from years ago and my hunter-gatherer self from millennia gone by.

Existential phenomenology intends to describe and understand lived experience, rather than explain it and make it mean something (Garko, 1999). It seeks to reduce an experience to its essence, which lies beneath layers of cultural meaning. What is the essence of physical activity then? Does such a thing exist, and how can we get there? Perhaps we can move past the discourses that surround women's exercise and discover what that moment of physical movement feels like for women. What drew me back to my bicycle, my running shoes, and the rack in the weight room was the very conscious feeling of that in-the-moment power, freedom, joy of body movement. It was not discursive technologies effecting power over me, nor was it me deciding how to fold in the dominant discourses because they simply were not there. In *I Sweat* I have fun with the idea that maybe there is a human essence. Perhaps it is in our being to run (and throw spears), as the hunter-gatherers did thousands of years ago, and as the Tarahumara tribe of Mexico, untouched by modern civilization, continues to do today. Maybe it is our

instinct to be physically active and to play – something that may be buried deep beneath our technology-induced sedentary society and our female objectifying discourses.

Women's lives told in our own language, a language of experience, are necessary for feminist research to move forward (Stanley & Wise, 1983). We have so often been spoken for through positivistic and patriarchal science, just as we are spoken for through dominant social discourses that tell us what it means to be a woman. We have been explained and interpreted to death. Might we cleanse ourselves of technologies of governmentality and return to things as they are? Can we strip away these discourses to find something that exists in all of us that wants for body movement, the wind rushing past our skin, the tingling deep within our muscles right before that lactic burn? And if, understandably, we are not willing to risk being over-essentialized as 'woman,' might we find within ourselves, as individuals, who we really are, what we really want, and then go and get it? Can we ignore the distractions, leave our watches and iPods at home, and just be in our bodies to feel, experience, and enjoy them? And if we have been so assaulted by disciplinary rationalities and we cannot find a place within ourselves that feels the freedom of physical activity, can we ask women to not only critically engage with femininity discourses, as with Foucauldian theorizing, but to also *imagine* their bodies without such discourses – to imagine what it might feel like to love your body simply because it is the part of you that allows you to see, smell, hear, and feel the world around you? Can we imagine how to love our bodies because they open us up to the world around us? Can we let our bodies become us and we become them so they no longer are things to be worked on and disciplined, but experienced and enjoyed? Can we love ourselves enough, enough, enough?

A lump in my throat swells as I imagine the almost unimaginable – a utopic scene of women who really and truly love their bodies – who do not look from the outside in, but feel from the inside out. I become full of hope and excitement lifts the hairs off of my arms, similar to my feeling while writing my narratives of resistance, but in stark contrast to the churning stomach and acid reflux that accompanied my words on technologies of the self. Foucault's theory of governmentality explains so well the world I experience around me and my resistant interactions with dominant discourses, but his idea of technologies of the self leaves me feeling helpless – always practicing freedom, but unable to obtain it (Lloyd, 1996). Of course, to write about or theorize an event in a different way does not change what that event was in the moment it happened. To write about running through a phenomenological lens does not mean that suddenly people who see me running will know my motivations and will be prompted to critique dominant discourses, but it does bring the focus to my body as it is without the weight of discursive technologies. It disrupts the 'norm.' It allows for a sharing of the corporeal and sensual experiences of body movement that have not been examined to a great degree in feminist scholarship (Allen-Collinson, 2011). And yet, to ignore the social world in a search for the essence of physical activity would be to depreciate the negative forces acting on women's bodies. Is there a middle ground?

Foucault and existential phenomenology rely on contradictory basic understandings of the world. Foucault's ideas are anti-humanist and anti-essentialist (Paden, 1987; Scheurich & Bell Mackenzie, 2005), while phenomenology urges us to 'return to the things themselves' in search of an essence of experience (Coole, 2007). These differences are highlighted throughout this paper in the ways I write about being

acted upon as meanings take shape through social movement, an anti-humanist and anti-essentialist perspective, as opposed to a going out into the world and Being, a more humanist and essentialist approach. Foucault's anti-essentialism enables feminist researchers to "go beyond the idea of emancipation as the recovery of an authentic, universal, female self" (Markula, 2003, p. 97). From this perspective, Foucault makes it possible for women to be who they choose to be through the numerous and diverse makings of 'woman'. In an aesthetic self-stylization, we are to create ourselves through resistant practices and change the social landscape through individual acts of freedom. Does this not sound a note of humanism and individualism? Likewise, phenomenology espouses a dialectical relationship with the life-world, in which we come to know ourselves through our own inter-subjectivity. Even in this simplified explanation of two very complex and layered philosophies, one might see each has a small part of the other (Coole, 2007). We are conceivably too quick to draw hard and fast lines between paradigms in an effort to clean up and organize lived experiences, to give them meaning, and to place them neatly in one box or its polar opposite box.

As Markula (2003) states, feminists need to ask women to articulate their critical awareness. I think Markula would agree that we cannot stop there (See Markula, 2005). We must share our own stories of negative *and* positive body inscription to ignite within women a critical reflection on the meanings their bodies possess for themselves and others, and on how these meanings come to fruition. We must also, in a return to the body, enact consciousness-raising by telling stories that flow from our embodied knowing (Garko, 1999; Harding, 1991). This autoethnography is my way of articulating my own critical awareness of the discursive construction of my body. It is my effort to

practice freedom, not only as resistance in ethical self-care, but also as adding my lived body experience to the collective story of women's bodies – two practices that philosophically may not jive, but that operate simultaneously within the minutes and hours of my life. Just as I break the rules of normative femininity, I have also broken the rules of dichotomous scholarship in order to question the totalization of theories in feminist practice and to highlight the danger of a single story. Can we loosen the grip of theory on our telling of women's lives if it means a more thoughtful, caring, compelling, and complete telling? Recognizing that lived experience is layered and often conflicting in meaning, we can make space for this complexity and even celebrate it through personal, evocative, and storied writing (Richardson, 1997; 2001; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). When we participate in the embodied act of writing we can begin to change the story of women's bodies by telling of resistance to femininity discourses, and by sharing with others the turning into ourselves in search of who we are. And we are strong. Our actions are beautiful.

Sometimes I just run

From nothing and to nowhere

Moving, feeling, living

Sky, wind, trees, birds

Flying with my feet

Sometimes I break all the rules.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Playing Narratively with Women's Life Histories of Physical Activity

My ladies wait for me, their lives encrypted into curves, dots, and dashes splashed across these pleated texts, these piles of paper that come alive as they slide, one by one, quickly through my fingertips. Their figures move before my eyes; they show me what words cannot, though words they are – an infinite array of narrative possibilities. My ladies invite me in, the pink glow of their sunsets misting softly against my own horizon of understanding. They're waiting...

Introduction

Having explored in the previous chapter my own lived body experiences with physical activity through autoethnography, I use this chapter to introduce my study participants and the overall plot of their individual physical activity life histories. I experiment with narrative and the numerous forms of representation that can be used to show or describe lived experiences, the interviews themselves, and the relationship between researcher and subject.

Narrative possibility in health promotion

Social determinants of health (SDH) describe the unequal distribution of economic and societal factors that influence the overall health of individuals, communities, and nations (Raphael, 2004; 2011). They also determine “the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment” (Raphael,

2004, p. 1). Gender is a SDH because societal values, expectations, and norms of men and women lead to health disparities. According to the WHO's Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008), millions of girls and women are affected negatively from a health perspective due to gender inequities.

Gender, while often listed as a SDH, is rarely studied (Phillips, 2011). Bryant (2009) states there is a “dearth of research that considers gender and how it interacts with the social determinants of health to increase the risk of adverse health outcomes” (p.3). The research on gender that does exist is largely epidemiological; it provides necessary statistical reassurance, through the sex disaggregation of data, that relationships exist between gender and health, but it does not deconstruct the *nature* of those relationships. According to Broom and Warin (2011), “The findings from surveys, however, can rarely make useful theoretical or policy sense by themselves: they also require interpretation that is guided and elaborated by information from other social science research methods and epistemologies” (p.457). Relying solely on statistical analysis does not acknowledge the lived reality of women's lives (Hankivisky et al., 2010). Researchers must engage with qualitative methodologies in order to unravel the meaning behind gender statistics and propose policy and interventions that are rooted in women's lived experiences (Phillips, 2011).

Narrative inquiry is a multidisciplinary, interpretive approach to qualitative research that involves “listening to people talk in their own terms about what had been significant in their lives” (Josselson, 1993, p. ix). Narratives may take the form of short stories, or entire life stories; they may be all encompassing or have a specific focus (Denzin, 1989). This study explores women's life histories of physical activity in order to

understand better the relationship between gender, specifically femininity, and physical activity.

Physical activity levels are widely understood to influence health outcomes through the prevention of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers, hypertension, depression, and osteoporosis (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). In Canada, women are less physically active than their male counterparts (Colley et al., 2011). The historicity of the human body genders physical activity and exercise, and health promotion campaigns could and should be grounded in the lived body experiences of those they are trying to reach, rather than justified by neoliberal rationalities that aim to simply educate populations and then wash its hands of those populations. Narrative inquiry provides a unique opportunity to investigate and explore what physical activity means to women and how those meanings have shifted and/or stayed the same throughout their lives in order to produce lived body experiences through lifestyle behaviours.

Ladies in waiting? The responsibility in taking on the lives of others

My aforementioned 'ladies' are my study participants: Rebecca, Sam, Gabriella, Janet, and Kate (pseudonyms). They are each between the ages of 30 and 40, live in London, Ontario, and speak English fluently. This age group was chosen because it represents a significant period in the social script of 'woman,' in which many transitions are experienced or at least often expected for women, including marriage, motherhood, and an introduction to anti-aging discourses. Participants contacted me via email to express interest in my study after hearing about it from one of the many colleagues and acquaintances I asked to share widely my Letter of Information (Appendix A). I

interviewed each woman twice in her home or place of work, audio-recording the interviews, and then transcribing them verbatim. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Transcripts were sent to participants to check for accuracy. Member checking for 'correct' analysis did not occur because it is understood that findings in narrative research are interpretive, co-constructions between researcher and participant that are created within a specific space and time (Chase, 1996).

Referring to my participants informally as 'my ladies' reminds me of their realness – the lives they are living, the jobs they are working, and the families they are growing. 'Lady,' with its evocation of female propriety, reminds me of the historical situatedness of each individual, as well as the social spaces that house our co-constructed texts. As their lives hibernate within the transcript pages that sit on my desk, I am cognizant of the responsibility I endure as researcher in my endeavor to negotiate meaning from 'my ladies'' words. The power structure that exists between researcher and researched (See, Briggs, 2003) conjures up an image of 'ladies in waiting.' For an autoethnographer accustomed to having unbridled access to my own experiences, ready for me to call them up into consciousness while I write of them – the emotion, the sights/smells/sounds, the physical sensations – I feel slightly uncomfortable in analyzing and representing women's lives from the flat, incomplete, one-dimensional pages of an interview transcript that I flip through my fingers. According to Smythe and Murray (2000), narrative researchers are often conflicted regarding how to do justice to their participants' perspectives of their lives and themselves, which may be quite different from the researchers' perspectives. Likewise, participants in feminist research are often

displeased with the way a “story is analyzed for the social processes it reveals rather than preserved in its uniqueness” (Chase, 1996, p. 50).

Keeping all of the aforementioned concerns in mind, I take seriously my work of ‘playing’ with narrative, as I labour towards what might be considered a feminist form of analysis and representation that serves both the research and my participants (See, Reinharz & Chase, 2003). With regards to narrative investigation, Reissman (1993) states, “There is no standard set of procedures compared to some forms of qualitative analysis” (p.54). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further encourage such boundless possibility in a call for narrative researchers to experiment with form. I sense the fluidity of my ladies’ narratives, as each time I read them, I think of a different angle or lens through which I can understand their meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, narratives are “unable to stand still in a way that allows for certainty” (p.37). Yet, there is something that stands out in each participant’s narrative, something that begs to be told, something that feels like it encapsulates each woman and lends itself to every part of her story. There are infinite narrative possibilities floating about, *and* there is an anchor in each life history. I take on Lieblich et al’s (1998) approach that “stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these ‘remembered facts’” (p. 8), or what Denzin (1989) might refer to as ‘true fictions.’ I seek this ‘core of facts’ from each participant, recognizing the many layers of interpretation that allow the core space to move.

This anchor in each woman's narrative can be signified as the plot. Polkinghorne (1995) describes two forms of narrative inquiry that are based on Bruner's (1986) two modes of thought. The first, which this chapter employs, is called narrative analysis, and it relies on a plot – a thematic thread that ties together an individual's experiences in order to construct context and meaning (Polkinghorne, 1995). The second, which is often emphasized in narrative study and which I have taken up and explained in the following chapter, is referred to as paradigmatic analysis of narrative. These two types of analysis can be complimentary. Paradigmatic analysis draws out themes that cut across participants, while narrative analysis obscures such abstract, general concepts by maintaining each participant's uniqueness (Oliver, 1998). Each method serves a different purpose, and in this chapter I use narrative analysis to configure narratives that “render some explanation, gives meaning to some experience, or offers insight into the motivation and purpose behind a chain of events,” (Oliver, 1998, p.251) specifically women's life histories of physical activity.

With emplotment in mind, I decide to invoke Richardson's (1994) notion of writing as inquiry, and allow the data, stewing within my guts and my lived body, to escape through my fingertips on keyboard. Relying on Bruner's (1986) narrative cognition that moves the researcher from categories or themes to a story, I employ language as a tool, acting as *bricoleur* to use whatever means the data begs me to use in order to emplot the parts of each woman's life history into her whole (Denzin, 1989). I feel a hermeneutic opening while working through an iterative process to create texts that encourage genuine dialogue between my participants, my self, and my readers. Gadamer

(2000) refers to such a text as an *I-thou* dialogue, emphasizing the text's power to transform the interpreter.

Such a dialogue requires texts that maintain a responsible view from *somewhere*, as opposed to an attempted objectivism, or what Haraway (2003) refers to as the “conquering gaze from nowhere,” or the “god trick” (p.26). Oliver (1998) describes criteria for narrative analysis based on Polkinghorne's (1995) and Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) direction, which includes setting, characters, and plot. Within each, she emphasizes the expectation for the researcher to be present as a participant herself, and to make explicit that presence in service of authenticity (Oliver, 1998). While I play with the shapes and forms my narratives take in service of the aforementioned *I-thou* relationship, I also play with my own presence within the narratives. Thinking *with* the stories, writing *with* my participants' histories, my voice grows louder or softer depending on how I relate – to the story, to the potential audience, to the culture in which the story was created (Ellis & Berger, 2003). Interviewing and the active relationships that form through them lead me to an exploration not only of women's life histories of physical activity, but of how best to represent these lives, mine included, and the meanings attached to them in order to allow for multiple interpretations and imaginings of alternative realities.

My ladies are waiting...

Rebecca

I like Rebecca immediately. She is a storyteller, a trait I share, and the stories that she has created over and over in her mind provide her with a deep and knowing sense of

self that she quite comfortably exposes. This consciousness presents itself through a quiet confidence that seems new and gives way to a vulnerability that flickers each time she finishes a thought with a rhetorical request for affirmation. “Right?” she asks often, and I am happy to be invited to participate in her storytelling, as we sit opposite each other at her kitchen table.

Rebecca begins her life history in childhood by painting a dreamy scene set in the country with lots of time spent being active outdoors, riding horses, and also enjoying organized games of softball and eventually fastball. Rebecca describes:

Yeah, in later grade school I played softball and fastball...Before that I did slow pitch. Um, and it was a mixed boys and girls league. And then, yeah, then I joined a girls' only competitive fastball league. Um, and we won! It was exciting. I remember I got the winning out. I was at third base and that was like a big deal, right?

“Absolutely!” I agree enthusiastically, remembering my own childhood during which, unscathed by the female objectification that would soon mark my body, I sent myself out into the world with an innocence that allowed me an intercorporeality that only children seem to possess. Excited just to move my body, I would sprint home from school, jump across puddles, chase leaves, climb trees, all the while extending myself outwards to grasp the world.

Rebecca hints at a future life-changing event, “the accident,” and I feel as if I am expected to know to what she is referring to. Perhaps she thinks the person who told her about my study may have informed me of Rebecca’s past. “The accident” is obviously a large part of that past. I’m intrigued, and wanting to hear more I’m unsure if I should prompt her at this point, or if I should wait. I balance my desire to give Rebecca the space

to tell her life history as she chooses with the acknowledgment that I am a part of this interview process by scribbling “accident” on my notepad as a reminder to inquire about it before I leave. It turns out I don’t need the reminder, as a minute later Rebecca explains:

I had one semester of grade ten and I barely started the second semester and I was in a car accident. I was front-seat passenger, um, head injury, coma for eleven days. Um, so then, and they had to use the Jaws of Life to get me out. I was stuck in the car, so it ended up I didn’t have any, like, broken bones or anything like that, but the injury that I had, I had abdominal injuries. So they had to split up my abdomen, like, up, right up the middle because they thought there was bleeding, internal bleeding...then they stapled me back together again...

I lean forward in my chair, my eyebrows raised and mouth drawn into an ‘o.’ My response is genuine, and I also think it’s what Rebecca was looking for, but I’m not sure whether I’m reacting to the events described or the matter-of-fact delivery. The tone shifts towards a medical narrative, as Rebecca describes the many medical professionals she encountered in her rehabilitation process, including a kinesiologist, physiotherapist, pedorthist, massage therapist, chiropractor, X-ray technician, and neurologist. Her own report of events takes on a medical tone, describing vividly how she was “split up the middle” and “stapled back together again:” how she experienced left side partial paralysis and a significant brain injury that continues to affect her on a daily basis. She speaks as if the wounds belonged to someone else, her disembodied account lacking any hint of what the injuries actually felt like, physically or emotionally. Her words represent a narrative surrender; they come across as borrowed or belonging to someone else, someone whose care she was forced to rely on while under the bright hospital lights (Frank, 2013).

Although she brings it up many times throughout the rest of the interview, Rebecca does not provide any more details about the accident, and I am left wondering about the particulars – who she was with, who was at fault, what her car collided with, and whether or not there were other injured parties. I want Rebecca to place herself back into a memory that she has consciously or unconsciously detached herself from. I want to hear her tell it in a way that no one else could – not one of her family members or medical personnel who know the same details Rebecca has provided. I am caught between wondering if it's really the researcher in me that wants to know what happened, or if it's simply me as a person, wanting to hear the gory details. I want to know if she is bitter, if she blames anyone, and I am afraid to push her any deeper into a memory that obviously changed her life. The relational endeavor of narrative interviewing becomes apparent. I err on the side of caution, not wanting to do harm, and I choose not to dig in here. Once I am home, I regret this decision, not only because I never learn of the particulars of such an important moment in Rebecca's life, but also because I feel as though I have patronized Rebecca in assuming she couldn't handle this topic (See, Josselson, 2007). Her continued allusions to the accident throughout our time together hints that she did indeed want to talk about it, and I may in fact have removed an opportunity for sharing, reflection, and growth.

If Rebecca is bitter, as I had wondered about, she hides it well, but I get the sense that she is not, and the accident itself is perhaps no longer the story; the story is what happened after. She continues:

I really enjoyed high school...socially, like, I felt like I was well-known because everyone knew because of what had happened to me in high school, right, and so it was like, socially, it was an interesting experience.

While Rebecca refers to the time of the accident as “the year that I lost,” I can’t help but feel that the storying, telling, and retelling of the accident in her mind and out loud provided and continues to provide Rebecca with a place from which she can anchor herself. Frank (2013) describes the wounded storyteller as “anyone who has suffered and lived to tell the tale (p.xi).” As I listen to Rebecca recount her rehabilitation, which included learning how to walk again and getting both sides of her brain to resume firing, I hear the creation of a new, post-accident self, one that fits in and is known to others. She states, “...this is how I work; I just tell stories... I feel like I kind of do [storytelling] a lot anyways because of my experiences as a teenager and a lot of people want to know what that was like, you know, being in a car accident and that kind of thing.”

With the loss of her bodily predictability, Rebecca uses storytelling to regain control, and in doing so she shifts from wounded victim to healer (Frank, 2013). Her lived body, shared with others in an act of intercorporeality, is a communicative body that connects her to others and allows a space for Being (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). As Rebecca describes moving away to college, her identity as a car accident survivor and rehabilitator fades to the background, and her sense of self presents itself as foggy. She explains how, without a physiotherapist’s rehabilitation program, she “jumped on bandwagons” with regards to physical activity as they were presented to her in her social surroundings. She falls into a cycle of gaining weight, struggling with mental health issues, trying a new form of physical activity, feeling it’s a bad fit for her, becoming inactive, and gaining weight again.

When she temporarily moves to Alaska for a summer job at a children’s camp, she catches a glimpse of a less complicated life, describing:

And so, that's what I did all summer. And it's funny because I was struggling in college with needing sleeping meds, and again, well I wasn't very active in the day. I went away for that one summer, and I took like a whole wack of sleeping meds because I was going to be gone for two months... I didn't need any sleeping meds because I was so active...All summer and outside, right? So whether it was helping the kids- so every day it was either me or my partner rounding up the horses, and then getting them ready. So it was a very physical thing, lifting the saddles up and getting the horses, brushing the horses and whatever. It's a very physical thing... and I slept like a baby every night, and so I didn't need any meds the whole time. And so when I got back and talked to the doctor about it, she's like, 'That's your solution then.'

Her story resonates with me, as I'm transported through her voice to a calm night, a fresh breeze gently swirling wisps of my hair around my face, cool grass beneath me, and my eyes gazing skywards towards sparkling wonder. The tightness in my gut relaxes, and my gaze unconsciously travels to Rebecca's stomach where I imagine a large scar is holding her together. I know in my body, as Rebecca does, the importance of physical activity to mental health and how the connection between the two can sometimes leave one trapped in a Catch-22, needing happiness to move your body and needing to move your body to find happiness. Rebecca had the solution, but it wasn't that easy. She continues, "I mean, 'cause I've done lots of things since- trying to be active, doing my Crossfit, doing the whatever, trying to eat well, going Paleo, and nothing has ever come back together to create this magic existence." *Split up the middle and stapled back together again.* Through a prolonged recovery and rehabilitation process after the accident, Rebecca learned how to 'fix' her body, something she continues to attempt long after the physical scars have healed. Rebecca has tried over and over to deconstruct her

Self, rearrange the pieces, and put them back together again in a remaking. Her wholeness is split between what her embodied Self wants and needs and what it actually ends up doing through the influence of trending health and fitness discourses.

In her quest for happiness, Rebecca describes numerous plot twists, or what Denzin (1989) refers to as epiphanies, as she tries on these numerous and consecutive health and fitness trends, many of which emphasize the importance of male-defined beauty ideals for women. Ultimately, her reflective, storytelling nature and ability to be mindful within her body, both of which she attributes to her near death experience, allows her to begin sawing away at the socially constructed connection between physical activity and ideal beauty. Referring to the ubiquitous phrase “Strong is the new sexy,” Rebecca argues, “Like, why do we have to sexualize these things? Why do we have to qualify it as that, right? Why can’t it just be?” It seems ironic that the event in her life, the accident, that led to her medically gazing upon herself is also the event that has given her the tools to remake herself one last time – this time from the inside out.

As I listen, I feel like Rebecca is on the brink of creating a self that is unencumbered and ready – ready to love all of her parts, and ready to stop ‘fixing.’ Even though this is a physical activity life history, I am astonished by the importance Rebecca places on physical activity; it is a major, if not *the* major piece to her happiness puzzle. Her narrative has taken enough twists to bring her full circle, right back to where she began – innocent play. A nostalgic feeling washes over me and I am almost proud of Rebecca, this woman I just met, as she completes her circle and becomes whole:

And so now I’m back to, you know what, I miss the days when it was just practical and I did fun things. So I joined a ball team for the summer. I thought- they practice, um, up until now we’ve been practicing every Sunday,

and now there will be games every Sunday from this Sunday until the fall, and then they'll practice in between whenever they can. Um, but so I thought that's something practical that I know I enjoy, and it's at least getting me out there and active getting, right? And feeling a little bit better about myself because again we know that that plays into it, right? You feel better about yourself because of the endorphins and all of that, right? So anyways, so getting stronger, and now I'm just literally getting to a point where I'm happy.

Through her personal growth and storytelling, Rebecca runs the bases of health and beauty trends, trying to fit someone else's uniform, only to find she belongs right where she began – on a baseball diamond, in a body that moves for fun. *Crack!* The baseball flies out to left field. Rebecca sprints past first base, stomps her right cleat on second as she flies onto third. She's being waved in! Excitement escapes through the goose bumps on her skin. Seeing the catcher with her glove ready, Rebecca slides into home. *Safe!*

I, too, am home in my use of narrative to construct meaning from Rebecca's stories. Here I employ reflexive dyadic interviewing, in which the interview itself follows the typical interviewing protocol, but the resulting narrative includes the researcher's emotional and cognitive reactions to the interview, how she constructed meaning through her own understanding of self, and how her own experiences relate to the topic at hand (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Ellis, 2004). Bochner (1997) describes the divided self, whose academic positioning puts her outside of her body, floating in the clouds thousands of kilometers above the world she studies. I am not divided, or split up the middle. My feet are firmly planted on Rebecca's kitchen floor. We both become whole through our narrative.

Kate

Kate sits across from me in her office. It's mildly chilly, but soon I am transported to a warm, summer day from Kate's childhood. These office walls cannot contain her life history, nor can they maintain my presence, as her words ignite visions and memories of my own past that take me elsewhere. I am drawn into a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, travelling through time, personal and social relations, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Kate takes me backwards in time, describing her childhood with a fondness that makes me picture the American television series, "The Wonder Years," in which the voice of Daniel Stern narrates his own coming of age in late 1960s suburbia. Kate depicts her own coming of age a decade and a half later than the main character, Kevin, saying,

I lived on a court... with probably 25 kids within my age range, so the moment we got home from school until the moment we went to bed, that's what we did. We went in for dinner and we went straight back outside, and we were playing baseball, hockey, soccer, tag, anything you could think of we pretty much played it, and then we all kind of moaned when our moms yelled at us at 8 o'clock and said it was time for us to come in for bed.

Grainy visions of carefree children romping in the street flicker in my mind's eye as if playing on an old home movie projector. This strikes me as odd since I have never actually watched movies on a projector. Competing with this vision are my own memories from childhood that are dramatically similar to Kate's. I would begin my description of childhood the same way: *I lived on a cul de sac*. Such a place is significant. To both Kate and I, growing up on a court or cul de sac was special. The circular haven feels private and safe, and with no through-traffic, it becomes a space for play that

children take over, one by one forming a group as each looks out his or her window to see something fun beginning. As I'm brought back to the present moment I am cognizant of how this place allowed for the construction of physically active, playful, innocent, and confident children – confident in our place in the world, in our right to feel safe. I think of the children living in low-income neighbourhoods where such places for play and self-discovery often do not exist. I think of neighbourhoods where gangs occupy such places and children cannot walk to school.

Kate continues her life history, emphasizing the social aspect of her physical activity throughout. For Kate, the elder of two daughters to a Physical Education teacher as father and an active mother, participating in sports was, as she articulates, “inevitable.” Sport and physical activity were woven into the matrix of her neighbourhood and family; they brought loved ones into shared spaces and were the scaffolding for the development of a positive identity.

When Kate began playing competitive basketball as a young girl, the community that supported her growth widened to include not only lasting bonds with teammates, but the other girls' parents as well. She continues:

So it was a really nice group of people, and the parents got to know each other really well, and some of us carried through from elementary to high school, which meant that there was that kind of long-term standing relationship with a lot of the parents.

In describing her decision not to tryout for the varsity basketball team upon entering university – something she regrets – Kate travels inwards and explains encountering a feeling of isolation amidst the loss of such a supportive community. She reflects, “It was hard to walk away from the sport, and then it was also hard to walk away from the

friendships and the relationships that came as a consequence of that sport.” When she finally collects enough members to put together her own intramural basketball team a few years later, Kate describes it as “coming home.”

As a mother now, Kate looks to the future and is highly motivated to continue the family tradition of identity construction through shared physical activity. She sees herself as a role model and actively participates in her children’s informal play, rather than simply observing. While she adds her children to her own sporting matrix, she assists them in creating their own scaffolding that will support their identity construction. In aiding her children’s development, Kate finds less time for gym workouts that she claims are motivated by health and vanity, but she never misses a game with her women’s basketball team, which consists of some of her childhood teammates. “I have no problem whatsoever to get to basketball twice a week. None whatsoever. Even when I was breastfeeding and I had to feed a baby and then get to basketball, I just made it happen,” she says.

The basketball court, for Kate, is a place just like her childhood court. Through basketball memories, Kate travels from past, through present, and into the future, describing the game as something she would like to continue into her senior years. She takes me with her through time and to a place that I also love – shoes squeaking on a waxed floor, a dimpled sphere passed friend to friend. The wonder years continue through basketball, highlighting the court’s significance as a personally historical place with inward and outward meaning. The court is home.

Sam**The Pill**

I had a lot of acne problems, so my doctor put me on the pill...

I didn't really feel like myself anymore...

I really think that was a huge turning point for, like, my body, and just how I felt about everything. I kind of got more depressed when I stopped sports.

Jacques Lacan (2006) describes the emergence of a subject as the “mirror stage.”

A baby that recognizes herself as the image reflected in a mirror identifies her existence for the first time, and this recognition is fundamental to the constitution of the ego.

Because the child has not yet mastered control of movement, the moving form in the mirror is understood as ideal or superior, and the emergent “I” becomes decentered from the body (Lacan, 2006). This process is denied, however, and covered by an illusion of complete wholeness (Rogers, 2007).

Sam never mentions the word ‘mirror,’ but as I read her transcript over and over I can’t get this image of her standing in front of a mirror out of my head. Her body and her reflection keep leaning into each other until they touch and morph into one, only to split again as space forms between them. She continuously moves in and out of her body throughout her life history, trying to find “I” as she describes the before and after effects of two life-changing events: starting birth control pills to control her acne and participating in fitness competitions and modeling.

I’m reminded of the pervasive ‘before and after’ photos meant to display people’s physical transformations. Sam’s narrative creates two before and after “I’s.” Unlike a typical before and after, Sam’s ‘before’ the pill represents the desired state. After the pill

she describes hours upon hours of cardio, sweated out in a futile attempt to return to this past self through a physical transformation. Failing this transformation, Sam pursues the expertise of a personal trainer at a big box gym. “He had me on programs. He started helping me with, like, what I should eat,” she says of her trainer. Her continued trust in him is evident in the way she speaks, and this is not surprising – he is now her husband. “I am still a product of what he has implemented,” she says at one point, and inwardly I cringe, imagining her husband putting together the pieces of an ideal woman/wife in some dark laboratory. I know this is not a fair assumption to make; I haven’t met the husband or quite grasped their relationship outside of the gym and working out.

I choose quotations from Sam’s transcript that will allow you, the reader, to understand her views of her past physical activity involvement. I arrange the quotes in a mirror-like juxtaposition to point you towards this transition I felt from centered to decentered or embodied to disembodied self.

Before

and

After

<p><i>I just liked being active.</i></p> <p><i>I mean, I spent just as much time, if not more [than ballet], playing hockey though because we were in every camp you could possibly imagine during school. After school we’d do our homework and then do our sports.</i></p> <p><i>Um, don’t know why I liked it. I was probably just a tomboy...It had nothing to</i></p>	<p><i>High school, I kind of liked to fade into the background later on, but we didn’t really have to do gym later on in high school either. There was one class in grade eleven I took. It was Fit for Life, and I was kind of trying to learn from the teacher, like, what kind of- the right things to do to lose weight.</i></p> <p><i>I’d say the last two years of high school and then university was just purely spent</i></p>
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<p><i>do with weight... I'm not going to promote this or anything, but I would go home, eat six doughnuts and not think twice about it.</i></p> <p><i>I think I would say I excelled in gym. It was always one of my favourite parts of the day. People would try to keep up with me.</i></p> <p><i>Up until 17, yeah sports. That was that. It never went any further than thinking how good could I be at hockey or track.</i></p> <p><i>I honestly did not care [what I looked like]. I wore tear-away pants and a T-shirt.</i></p>	<p><i>on how can I lose weight and be skinny.</i></p> <p><i>I did continue just recreational hockey, but other than that- and even at that point hockey became a sweat session basically, like, how can I get more working out in so I can lose weight? ...I didn't enjoy it as much. I did it because it was another workout to add to my list.</i></p> <p><i>Like, that's all that was, was just purely being on the treadmill for sometimes, like, an hour, and then another hour, and then, like- It's always more, more, more, and it really probably wasn't giving me any results, but that's all that was. I couldn't figure out what to do.</i></p> <p><i>I didn't think I looked like what girls should look like.</i></p>
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As I get to the part of the transcript where Sam describes her experiences with fitness competitions and modeling, I sense an inner conflict, as if she hasn't decided yet if she regrets these experiences, or if she wants them to be a part of her "I." Rogers' (2007) explains the 'divided "I"' through listening to the unconscious:

She will try to romanticize herself and her life through stories in which she tries to re-create the whole and perfect imago of the mirror. But this evocation of the ideal self, this imaginary "I," is interrupted by involuntary faltering, slips of the tongue, and unconscious signifiers that imply unknown truths. In

this way, the imaginary “I,” who upholds the ideal self, is undermined by the voice of a faltering “i” linked to the real and characterized by momentary incoherence in the subject’s narrative. These opposing forces define the divided “I” (p.112).

In Sam’s case, the quotes on the left represent the ideal self, while those on the right hint at unknown truths that bubble beneath the surface, causing contradictory perspectives of fitness shows and modeling.

Perfect for a Day

Reluctantly Realistic

<p><i>And he was going to do my diet for my show, so my show was in May that I chose to do. Or I met with [nutritionist] and [nutritionist] said yes, you could probably do this based on how you look right now and where we could get you. So he was my nutrition coach and [trainer/husband] did my training.</i></p> <p><i>I’m glad I did the shows, and I’m glad I’ve done- like, I’ve got tons of pictures now, and things I’ve experienced because of it, but it’s kind of, um, it’s allowed me to learn a lot about nutrition and working out and what’s, um, what you should be doing and what’s a waste of time, and how you see all these girls doing just, like, hours and hours and hours of cardio, and your body’s pretty much just adapting to what you’re doing, so really not doing anything.</i></p>	<p><i>For a female, you’re screwing up your hormones, and you’re gonna pay for it. Like, these girls come off shows, and they just have these binge fests, and they look like they’ve put on, like, 60 pounds within weeks.</i></p> <p><i>Body dysmorphia because you see yourself on that day, and you’ll never look like that again until you compete again. And I made the mistake the first time going to buy new pants and stuff because by the end everything’s falling off. Like, none of my clothes fit. So I would go and buy new clothes and then 2 weeks later you can’t fit into them. Not that I did, like, huge rebounds or anything, but it’s not- you don’t stay that small</i></p> <p><i>So they’re taking all these foreign things- I dunno. To each their own, but my point is,</i></p>
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Well, because you build muscle so it's just interesting to see what you can do and especially when I started competing and you lean down- seeing what you actually have built. Really neat.

I've asked judges what they're looking for 'cause I liked doing bikini. Basically judging you on if you're hot or not. And if you've got a big butt. Big boobs and a big butt, and if you're hot. That's literally they're judging- Like, there's not- there aren't many judges who could give you actual criteria for bikini.

Totally exhilarated. It was just the best thing ever. And it's like, for that one day, you've got your tan 'cause the night before you get your tan on and everything... it sounds really, really off, I guess, but it's like, I would love to have that, like, kind of feel emaciated and just little. And sometimes if you have body image issues, that probably isn't the best thing, but it's, like, a good feeling. You look your best. Like, everything you've done for that whole year to work up to that, I mean, new muscle you've maybe put on or, like, if you've done everything right and you've cut properly and things

it's an obsession. It's like, ok, I took a little bit of caffeine and Ephedrine, what's a little bit better than that? Clenbuterol. Ok, what's a little bit more- next show, what can I do a little bit better and come in a little bit harder, or a little bit leaner? Add T3 to that mix. So it kinda becomes- like, for a trophy.

So now it's more about how I function. After having a baby it's a little bit different.

Um, some of the stuff from, like, competing is still there because I saw how good I could look. Even, like, photo shoots. I'd look at, like, a lot of the photo shoots and it's really hard because you look so good.

And you have fake hair in, fake tan, fake everything, and it's fun to look like that for the day, but I know it's not realistic.

Maybe I wouldn't have such a warped view either of, like, my body, but...

Well, like I said, those shows definitely have had an impact- not a positive one on, like, how you look at yourself. Like, almost wanting to be better. It's definitely played with my mind.

It almost became an obsession. And that was just about- it was all about how you

<i>are showing, you just- you look great.</i>	<i>look.</i>
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The divided “I” is especially connected to the concept of *address* in Rogers’ et al. (1999) textual method of interpretive poetics. Address refers to whom the interviewee is speaking. While it can be assumed Sam is speaking to me as the interviewer, her address shifts when her unconscious emerges towards what Lacan refers to as the “Other” of the unconscious (Rogers, 2007). I hear Sam’s voice in my memory. *You, you, you*. She’s no longer speaking to me, but to herself, as if she is trying to make herself see those unknown truths bubbling in her unconscious.

For a female, you’re screwing up your hormones and you’re going to pay for it.

Body dysmorphia because you see yourself on that day and you’ll never look like that again until you compete again.

So I would go and buy new clothes and then 2 weeks later you can’t fit into them.

I’d look at, like, a lot of the photo shoots and it’s really hard because you look so good. And you have fake hair in, fake tan, fake everything, and it’s fun to look like that for the day, but I know it’s not realistic.

Well, like I said, those shows definitely have had an impact- not a positive one on, like, how you look at yourself.

And that was just about- it was all about how you look.

Though Sam tries to rationalize her participation in fitness shows as an educational experience, the negative repercussions seem to weigh heavily on her. I sense her inner being wrestle with her own gaze, shifting between to-be-looked-at-ness and agency, as she narrates her own self-surveillance and body domination. It was her appearance, a mirrored reflection, within the fitness competition world, that told Sam who she was – a late juncture Lacanian “mirror stage” that she now struggles to let go of. Perhaps it is through her continued consumption of the fitness industry that she embodies

what Frank (2013) refers to as “the mirroring body,” in which “the body sees an image, idealizes it, and seeks to become an image of that image” (e-reader). In Sam’s case, the ideal image was a woman at her gym. She explained:

I kept seeing this girl there all the time, and I was like, “Wow, like, she looks good. Like, she had the cap shoulders, and she was very- at the time I guess people were like, “Oh she’s so toned,” but it’s not really- she’s just lean, and she had good muscle structure to her. So I asked [trainer] what she does, and then I saw her on the news, too, and was like, “Oh, she does figure.” ... I would watch her all the time just in awe of this girl. So I said to him one- I think it was in October of the next year, so I started training with him in March and in October I’m like, “I want to do that.”

Sam’s work to transform her body into this ideal image creates a disembodied self that is disconnected from others (Frank, 2013). As I remember her infant daughter grabbing at Sam’s face during our interview, I wonder what role her baby will play in Sam’s re-embodiment, predicted by the unknown truths that cause her back and forth movement. “My body is for her now,” Sam said, with regards to her daughter. I feel the connection between them, the intercorporeality that perhaps will allow Sam to reconcile her selves.

Janet

Janet’s stomach growls, and she’s glad the constant hum of the airplane conceals her hunger. It saves her from having to withstand her mother’s badgering comments about her weight and her ‘out of control’ appetite. As the plane makes its way from Australia to the United States with Janet and her parents on board, Janet loses herself in the pages of the latest *Babysitter’s Club* book. The girls in the novel distract her from the all too

common symptoms of malnourishment that she often feels. The distraction doesn't last, though; when the characters go out for burgers and hot fudge sundaes, Janet's mouth begins to water. Her fingers unconsciously let go of the pages, and as the book closes on her lap she imagines what it would be like to bite into a meaty burger, something her vegetarian parents would never allow. Janet can feel the juicy hamburger on her tongue. Her stomach rumbles again, and she crosses her arms over her waist and leans forward, thinking of her father in the aisle seat, who dismissed the peanut offering flight attendant only minutes ago. *Peanuts have too much fat*, she hears his voice in her head.

Janet's thoughts return to the Babysitter's Club and those hot fudge sundaes. She wonders for a few moments what food in the United States is like. *What's in a hot fudge sundae?*

"What are you looking forward to doing on holiday?" Janet's mom asks her abruptly. Not yet proficient in lying at the tender age of seven, Janet blurts out that she really wants to try a Hershey's chocolate bar and a hot fudge sundae. Her mother looks at her with great disappointment, and Janet shrinks in her seat.

When they arrive in the United States, Janet is overwhelmed by the food that seems to be everywhere. It looms down on her from large billboards, and inviting smells drift out of restaurants into the streets where she walks behind her parents, trying to keep up with their brisk pace. *If only I wasn't so hungry*, she thinks. When her parents stop at a souvenir shop, Janet is quick to eye the Hershey's chocolate bar near the cashier. She stares at it longingly, her gaze travelling back and forth between it and her parents. Her perspective contracts to the size of a pinhole with this chocolate bar at the end of her

childish tunnel vision. She knows the world will end if she cannot have it, and grasps it tentatively, as if her hand is unsure how to hold such a thing.

Heart beating fast, Janet feels a mixture of relief, surprise, and excitement when her father begrudgingly agrees to purchase the treasured chocolate bar that remains perched delicately atop her open palm. She can't wait to tear it open and taste the sugary treat. As her fingers begin to close around the chocolate, Janet's father snatches it away, opens the bar, snaps off one square and hands the morsel to his daughter.

"You can have one square a day. Don't complain." Janet's father blurts, adding, "You're too fat," for good measure. The cashier attendant raises his eyebrows in surprise, as he looks down at Janet, a sturdy, healthy looking child.

The family's two-week vacation is nearly complete when the chocolate bar is finally finished, its last pieces crumbling and squished from storage in Janet's mother's purse. On their last day in the United States, Janet sits across her parents in a booth at a restaurant that plays loud music. This isn't the kind of restaurant they usually go to, and Janet feels optimistic as she watches the wait staff conga out of the kitchen to sing Happy Birthday to someone at a table nearby.

"Can I get a hot fudge sundae for dessert, please?" Janet draws out the last word as if she's begging for her life. Exasperated from requests for hot fudge sundaes for the past two weeks, Janet's mom rolls her eyes in disgust and laments, "Fine. But if you're having a sundae then you can't have dinner. Your choice."

"Sundae!" Janet shrieks without even thinking.

Her parents order their light meals. "Just a water for her," Janet's dad instructs the waiter. When the food arrives, Janet watches her parents eat, breathing in the smells of

their food as her head and body ache from hunger, reminding herself of the hot fudge sundae that would soon be hers. She would be just like the girls in the Babysitter's Club – normal girls who were allowed to eat what they wanted, who didn't have to ask permission to open the fridge. Janet sits quietly on her side of the booth, watching each bite her parents take, wondering what it would be like if just one of them was normal. *Let your mom eat her salad. Let's go get some real food!* she imagines her dad saying. Then they would go to a burger joint and sit on the same side of the booth together.

“What are you doing? How are you going to make weight? Now Lauren and I are going to have to make up for you!” Janet angrily questions her rowing teammate who has half a cheese bun in her mouth. They sit in the high school cafeteria. It's loud with chairs screeching across the floor, silverware clattering on plates, and teenagers socializing with their cliques. With a full mouth, the teammate asks, “Aren't you guys going to eat anything?” Janet and Lauren look at each other in disbelief. “Of course not,” Janet replies, “tomorrow's race day.” Their half filled thermoses of cabbage soup they made together at Janet's house the night before remain closed.

They had been reading magazines in Janet's bedroom. “This one says to put a pencil under your boob and see if it falls,” Lauren said, as Janet tried her own skinny test by placing a ruler across the front of her protruding hips to see if her stomach touched it. Janet's mother came in and chuckled knowingly. “I can tell you how to lose weight,” she said with eagerness, continuing, “I lost a lot of weight when I was young. You just have to make sure to never go over 1000 calories.” Janet's mom invited them to look at her cookbooks, where they found the recipe for cabbage soup with carrots.

After weigh in on race day, Lauren's parents bring out enough food to feed a small army. Both Lauren and Janet grab hungrily at the enormous sandwiches stuffed with avocado, cheese, and meat. They binge like food is going out of style, and it's only their youthful bodies that allow them to race on such full stomachs.

The cycle of starvation and bingeing becomes well practiced for Janet. It continues after she stops rowing, but her body can no longer regulate amidst the days of undernourishment followed by the inevitable binge. She almost doubles her body weight within a year, and she dreads the shocked looks people give her when they see her new body for the first time. Her reflection in the mirror prompts a period of severe restriction. When everyone walks out of the aerobic step class that just ended, Janet stays for a second class, relying on 300 calories per day to fuel her life. When she can no longer sustain the restriction she binges and purges, and when she can no longer purge, she simply binges. Her reflection in the mirror prompts a period of severe restriction...

Janet crosses the Pacific Ocean again. I see the plane below me, as I sit safely perched on my cloud in the sky, or at least I wonder if that's where I am. Have I performed the 'god trick' by removing myself from Janet's narrative? Upon reflection, I wonder if I've written from a disembodied position because I didn't see myself in Janet's story. Her parents' restriction on her eating, which led, in partnership with participation in the weight-focused sport of rowing, to her own disordered eating and exercise habits are such vastly different experiences from my own. Further reflection, however, tells me this is not why I wrote from the third person, and maybe I wasn't playing god after all. Janet's life history drew me in, and the vision of a child not being allowed to eat when hungry

made me feel raw with empathy. It is precisely the difference between our upbringings that has led to our two very different bodies – one slim, one large – interacting in this way, one captivated by the other.

I wanted the reader to experience what I experienced as I sat in Janet's office, listening to her lifelong struggle to manage diet and physical activity. The events in Janet's life stand out to me more so than the way she is storying them. I hold back my interpretation in order to show, rather than tell (See, Geertz, 1973). Of course there is still interpretation at play; Janet has interpreted her past, my presence has likely influenced the way she has storied it, and I have chosen specific events from her telling to create these scenes. Rather than include direct quotations, I was drawn to storytelling simply to invite the reader in to gauge for herself the causality of Janet's struggle, and to encourage the reader to reflect on her own previous bodily experiences.

I watch Janet's plane fly over the ocean, but I'm not in the clouds; I'm right here beside her. Her words flow through me into a storied reorganization. This time, as she crosses the ocean, Janet leaves behind her parents and uses the rotating force of her binging and restricting cycle to propel her forward towards body acceptance. She marries a man with what she believes to be the healthiest relationship with food she has ever seen. He is naturally drawn to nutritious foods, he eats what he wants, occasionally he goes overboard, but he feels no guilt – he enjoys it and moves on. Janet finds another new relationship, this one with weightlifting. Initially wary of the spandex suits and weight categories, Janet finds her Olympic lifting training and competitions to be a place where her talents are recognized and her body size and shape are an integral part of her success.

Gabriella

My interviews with Gabriella took place on the couch within the empty waiting room of her chiropractic office. Gabriella is not my chiropractor, but I wrote what follows within the setting of a chiropractic appointment to emphasize the physical, emotional, and personal relationships that constitute what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) refer to as the active interview.

I feel my eyes bulge, as blood rushes to my face, which lies parallel to the ground. Gravity pulls my squished cheeks and loose lips towards the square design on the carpeted floor, but the soft ring that hugs my face and holds up my head makes me feel as light as an astronaut in space. Lying facedown on the medical table, I can see Gabriella's shoes making small shifts back and forth on the carpet as she maneuvers around my body. I relish the feeling of being physically manipulated. The weightlessness of my body lies softly within my consciousness as I finally relinquish control. After years of a physiotherapist prescribing and monitoring exercises meant to create more optimal alignment and movement patterns, my left knee continues to swell, burn, ache, and prevent me from doing what I love – crushing volleyballs, hiking in the woods, sprinting up hills, squatting with a heavy bar cutting into my upper back. It's a relief to try something new. Hope for the reconciliation of my past and future selves stirs within me, as I feel Gabriella take on a portion of my physical and mental soreness while moving my body for me.

Few would say our bodies are similar, but in this moment we are connected. Gabriella takes the weight of my body in her hands and places my limbs just so before bearing her weight onto me in a jolting collapse. My back cracks, and Gabriella and I

continue our fluid weight exchange that creates a being, both thick and thin. She continues telling me about her thoughts on physical activity:

I guess, um, what I learned in university that I shared before was, I think that if something, if something that you love starts to become sort of a chore that you dread going to do, you should probably change your- either change that activity or figure out a way to get back to doing it in a way that you like. So when I stopped playing varsity volleyball, I went to recreational volleyball with friends, and I found that it was just so much more fun, and I didn't dread practice, the workouts didn't seem like they were awful. And that's why, switching to university golf, it felt like I had a little bit more control. Even if I wasn't awesome, it was still fun, and I still got exercise and social time. So I would say, maybe there's a lot of people doing things they think they should do as far as physical activity, but they don't like, and maybe take a different perspective of it.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) describe narrative resources as “stocks of knowledge” (p.33) that are called upon and activated within the give-and-take of an interview. Here, Gabriella activates a reflexive part of herself that has seemingly figured out the trick to maintaining a physically active lifestyle. Her words travel from her body, through her fingertips, and deep into my muscles where each individual fast twitch fiber has memorized myriad movements performed through every emotion, but always in expression of self. I think along with Gabriella. *Find something you enjoy.* She grips my head between her hands and twists without warning. *Make an adjustment.* Her narrative becomes me as I imagine what an adjustment would look like for the body she holds in her hands. If I turned the page and let go of my past athlete self, if I created a new self with the knee I have now, what would it look like?

I take Gabriella's words in and consider this a good time to question something I am curious about. "Do you think there is a difference between exercise and physical activity?" I ask. She explains that exercise has a negative connotation, and when I ask where that comes from, she says:

Um, that comes from, like, me thinking exercise is, like, spending an hour running and sweating and feeling like I'm going to throw up. That's what I think of when someone says exercise versus physical activity, I feel like that [physical activity] to me means whatever you want to do that makes you happy that gets you moving counts. So yeah, exercise has a negative connotation, I guess, but on the other hand, I do tell patients of mine, you need to exercise, so maybe I should just start saying, "You need to have some sort of physical activity," so they won't think it's negative either. I'm going to try that.

It seems my use of the word 'exercise' activates a positional shift, as Gabriella switches to thinking of herself as a health professional. This shift demonstrates the complexities of telling through the multiple roles inhabited in one's life, reminding me that meaning is not fixed, but dependent on which stock of knowledge is being drawn upon (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). It seems significant to me that although Gabriella feels a sense of disapproval regarding the label 'exercise,' she still uses it with her patients. Perhaps this seemingly unconscious choice of word is related to her role as chiropractor, in which her physical manipulation of others' bodies is done with intention, and physical activity as an extension of her treatment is also meant to be done with intention – the intent being to prevent or treat injury. I agree with Gabriella's explanation. To me, 'exercise' is a dirty word filled with the drudgery of responsibility to others that I did not ask for, including the obligation to look a certain way and to avoid the risk of illness and

impairment. It feels like discursive domination meant to shape my docile body through the neo-liberalist project that is sometimes health promotion in Canada, which I described in Chapter One. ‘Physical activity,’ on the other hand, is a phrase that fills me with the sense of possibility, the opportunity for wellness. It’s about gaining something positive, as opposed to avoiding something negative through risk prevention.

Gabriella’s openness to changing her practices based on her reflection demonstrates her awareness of her various stocks of knowledge and how they might overlap or inform one another. I’m forced to wonder what would happen if Gabriella did indeed begin telling her patients they need to be physically active. I imagine, to become a tool of medical intervention or health promotion, the term ‘physical activity’ would simply take on the moral tone of ‘exercise,’ the power relationship between health practitioners/promoters and ‘patients’ now redirected through this new discourse (See, Foucault, 1978). I’m startled out of my thought when Gabriella says:

Um, I guess too, it’s almost summer time and I have a pool party on the weekend, so I’m thinking, “Oh shoot, I have to wear a bathing suit” [laughs]. And some days I’m like, “Okay, I should workout little bit more,” and some days I feel like, “Oh, who cares? They’re just my friends anyways. Everyone knows what I look like.” So I guess that’s today.

Gabriella outlines the narrative resources or possible means of thinking about a pool party, highlighting the complexity of her relationship with her body. While the two ways are different, I am struck by how working out is inextricably linked to appearance with the intention to look good in a bathing suit. When she doesn’t care about how her appearance is perceived, the implication is that she doesn’t need to workout. She is certainly referring to ‘exercise,’ rather than ‘physical activity.’ Gabriella’s aesthetic self-

stylization, her creation of a beautiful life, as described in Chapter Three (See, Foucault, 1985), is marred intermittently by bouts of body dissatisfaction that reinforce the oppressive bodily norms she, at other times, resists. I empathize with her struggle, as I also cling to a bodily norm, my own able-body-ness. Unsure of whether or not my knee will ever get ‘better,’ I flirt with disability, finding myself unwilling to jump in with both feet. I cling to a deep socially engrained hierarchy of bodies that I sit atop, denying an impaired future.

Together we tweak and pull at the hierarchies that prevent us from fully rejoicing in the bodies that we clearly respect. Gabriella unknowingly encourages me to deconstruct the hierarchy of bodies that prevents me from accepting the state of my knee and an identity as a different type of athlete/person. At the same time, the process of reflection and narrative telling encourages Gabriella to reconsider her own relationship as a health professional and woman to ‘exercise’ and ‘physical activity.’ The distance between our two bodies decreases, as power flows between us – Gabriella as doctor and I as patient, Gabriella as subject and I as interviewer. Our shared openness allows for new insights and understandings through a fusion of horizons.

Reflections on Playing with Narrative

As I wrote each woman’s narrative, I found it challenging to let our co-constructed stories exist on their own. I was tempted to compare each woman to the others when similarities between them became evident, as I was tempted to situate the stories within a broader sociocultural context. I fought this urge, knowing I would contextualize the women’s life histories in my next chapter and because I wanted to gain

for myself and provide for the reader a sense of whom each woman is individually and understand the unique anchor to her physical activity life history – Rebecca’s full circle narrative, Sam’s pre- and post-fitness competition self as divided, Janet’s heart wrenching relationship with her parents and its influence on eating and physical activity, Gabriella’s simple answer of finding physical activity she enjoys, and the importance of community in Kate’s basketball life.

Subverting hegemonic academia, I employ distinct styles of representation for each woman’s narrative, choosing my approach based on what I feel will allow me to condense many pages of life history transcripts into something that is meaningful and accessible for an audience. By painting a conversational picture of either the interview or its content, I intended to draw the reader into what Gadamer (2000) refers to as a genuine *I-thou* dialogue, allowing readers to feel the experience of another, perhaps the feminine Other, in a fusion of horizons. While potentially creating a collective or shared experience with readers, my participants’ narratives defy essentialism by standing alone in their own space.

For Rebecca, I chose a reflexive, dyadic interview style, as described by Ellis (2004). While the actual interviews took on a traditional tone, our co-constructed narrative includes my own feelings and reactions to what Rebecca says, providing the reader with further insight into the layers of story that create what Richardson (1997) refers to as ‘pleated texts.’ This method answers Frank’s (2013) call to think with stories, rather than about them. He writes, “To think with a story is to experience it affecting one’s own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one’s life” (e-reader). Rebecca

and I share a reflective nature that allows us to be cognizant of our shifting identities. Rebecca's mindfulness allows her to find wholeness.

I set Kate's narrative against the backdrop of "The Wonder Years" in a nod to both her and my racial and economic privilege. As a white, middle class, straight woman, Kate's narrative is about being part of something and how integral belonging is to a person's identity construction. Kate belongs to her basketball family, which includes not only her teammates, but their families as well, some of which she has known since childhood. In her life, physical activity, especially basketball, is a way for Kate to connect with others and create lasting bonds. Together we move through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, travelling through time, personal and social relations, and place.

Sam's narrative embodied a back and forth struggle, as she expressed the objectifying male gaze as coming from within her. I presented large portions of direct quotations, not to establish a form of authenticity – which some narrative researchers would claim and then be criticized for (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012) – but in an effort to show, rather than tell her struggle. I did this by juxtaposing quotations within 'before and after' and mirror frameworks that allude to objectifying practices within the fitness industry.

I feel conflicted regarding my approach to representation of Janet's physical activity life history. As omnipresent narrator, I am a disembodied being in the clouds, sitting so high that I can watch her plane cross the ocean. I worried while writing that I was playing Haraway's (2003) god trick, an irresponsible view from nowhere. As I sat in Janet's office, listening to her story, I was moved by her experiences and the rich description that allowed me into her life. Her story felt strong, like it didn't need me, like

I didn't have a place in it. I used my role as researcher, then, simply to turn her words into a piece of writing that might allow readers to have the same experience I did in Janet's office. I added the setting and description and then stepped back a respectful distance.

Moving all the way to the other side of the researcher voice continuum, I dove into Gabriella's narrative with an interactive voice to play with the idea of intercorporeality within the interview process. While the actual interview took place on a couch in Gabriella's chiropractic office, I chose to present it as a doctor-patient interaction to thwart the typical power position a researcher holds over an interviewee. Looking back, it may also allude to the power differential that exists between medical professionals and disabled people, as I 'flirt with disability,' although the exchange between Gabriella and I feels equal. We share each other's weight, literally and metaphorically, as we move together in chiropractic adjustment, and I take on her narrative as she takes on my injury.

Each of 'my ladies' share common physical activity experiences and stories, but my hope here is not to demonstrate emergent themes or even to answer my own research questions, but rather to create a space for shared experience between these narratives and the reader. My presentation of narratives is intended to encourage reflexivity, an interpretation of one's own physical activity life history, and openness to new understandings. In the next chapter, I look across participants, finding a shared life history structure as well as emergent themes.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Embodied Reclamation: Women's Life Histories of Physical Activity

Introduction: Gender as a Social Determinant of Women's Health

The previous chapter used a holistic analysis to demonstrate the ways physical activity, exercise, and sport are all undertakings through which girls and women perform gender. This chapter explores, through structural and thematic content analysis of narratives, the physical activity life histories of my participants. I provide further information regarding study methods, including data collection using the Life Book Activity, which was not mentioned in the previous chapter, and analysis. Findings from the structural analysis are presented in Part One. The women's ascribed meanings of physical activity shifted through periods of play, sport competition, a means to thinness, re-embodiment through physical activity, and imagined future roles of motherhood. Emergent themes from the thematic content analysis are presented in Part Two and include: *A hierarchy of activities*, *Triangle of exercise, diet, and thinness*, and *The importance of social influencers*. These themes are identified in order to better understand the relationships between femininity discourses, social expectations for women, the lived body, storied physical activity experiences, and current physical activity levels and perceptions. Such an understanding can inform future health promotion initiatives that are grounded in research and the lived realities of women's lives.

Physical activity is widely accepted as a determinant of future health outcomes through the prevention of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers, hypertension, depression, and osteoporosis (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin,

2006). Globally, physical activity is the fourth leading risk factor for overall mortality (World Health Organization, 2010), and its annual economic consequences in Canada are in the \$10 billion range (Barnes et al., 2016). Despite its importance, only 15% of Canadians meet the recommended guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week, and only 5% accumulate that 150 minutes through 30 minute bouts on 5 or more days per week (Colley et al., 2011).

Health promotion that focuses on physical activity levels typically engages its audience through educational campaigns regarding the risks of sedentary behaviour and/or the benefits of a physically active lifestyle (Raphael, 2002; Thompson & Kumar, 2011). According to Marcus et al. (1998) and the current, dismal physical activity levels, these campaigns are ineffective; their audiences are able to recall the messages informing them of the behaviour they ‘should’ be performing, but this knowledge does not translate into significant behavioural change. Ironically, while writing this dissertation on women’s experiences of and perceptions of physical activity, I have become quite sedentary myself, more so than at any other point in my life – by leaps and bounds. I am well aware of the health benefits of regular exercise and I possess the knowledge and ability to participate in any number of physical activities or sports, even on my graduate student budget; yet, there is something holding me back. What is it?

Raphael (2004) and Marmot (2005) describe the lifestyle approach to health promotion as neoliberal rationalities and suggest we instead investigate and pursue the ‘causes of the causes’ – the social determinants of health. These define “the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment” (Raphael,

2004, p. 1). Gender is a social determinant of health that is rarely studied beyond the statistical sex differentiation of data, leaving health promoters with the knowledge that relationships exist between gender and health, but with a poor understanding of the nature of those relationships and how best to address them (Bryant, 2009; Phillips, 2011). Narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to explore the lived experiences and textuality of a phenomenon, in this case women's physical activity (Clandinin, 2007). Outside the scope of this study, but important for future research, is the relationship men face between masculinity and physical activity experiences, and also masculinity and overall health, especially in relation to risk-taking behaviour (Phillips, 2005).

Methodology and Methods

Narrative inquiry relies on the rich, detailed descriptions of lived experience that are called for to enrich our understanding of the relationship between femininity and women's physical activity (Broom & Warin, 2011). Such an exploration relies on numerous levels of interpretation through which both the living and the telling of lives are significant to the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Bruner (1994) states, "A life as led is inseparable from a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (p. 36). The researcher adds another level of interpretation. Meaning is created as participants' stories filter through the researcher, me, during analysis and representation (Chase, 2005). I consider myself the sixth participant and reflexively write myself into the text, exploring my own subjectivity and the ways my lived body moves with and against the themes that are shared by the other five participants.

The life histories collected in this study focus on the specific aspect of physical activity and exercise experiences. In the previous chapter, the life history of each participant was analyzed holistically through what Polkinghorne (1995) refers to as narrative analysis. This type of investigation moves from elements within the life history to story, or the creation of a narrative that is held together by a plot. In this chapter, I employ a paradigmatic analysis of narratives, which moves in the opposite direction, from stories to common elements or themes among participants. In this mode of analysis, the life histories are the narratives, and analysis moves across individuals to find shared experience (Polkinghorne, 1995). This study relied on inductive analysis, described below, in which the shared themes emerged from the data, rather than imposing previously existing concepts or theories onto the data (Sparkes, 1999).

Narratives are both enabled and constrained through the social scripts available to us that often govern our behaviour (Partington et al., 2005). Our narrative resources, which we draw upon to construct personal stories, are historically and culturally situated, and they become linked with individual biographical experience (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Feminist researchers, particularly, appreciate the access narrative inquiry provides to women's subjectivities and the meanings they assign to their lived experiences as they intermingle the living and telling of their lives with the social world through which these lives and stories are produced (Chase, 2005). Narrative inquiry presents the opportunity to challenge gendered or disempowering social scripts and imagine and create alternative realities (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998).

Participants

Approval for this study was granted by the Western University Ethics Board prior

to any contact with participants. Participants were purposively identified for potential participation through snowball or chain sampling, which recognizes potential cases from people who know others with information-rich experience (Creswell, 2007). The process began when I distributed Letters of Information (Appendix A) via email to my social and professional circles, these individuals acting loosely as gatekeepers. I asked each gatekeeper to pass on the Letter of Information via email to women they knew who met the inclusion criteria and might be interested in participating in the study. It was assumed that allowing a middle person, who remains unaffiliated with the study, to contact potential participants would promote purposeful identification because they would likely contact people they knew to have an interest in the topic and be information-rich, and this assumption proved correct. In contacting gatekeepers, I stressed that women of all levels of physical activity were encouraged to participate in the study, and I explained that potential participants should not be common acquaintances between us. Using gatekeepers also ensured that participants did not feel pressured to participate. Those who were interested in participating made first contact with me via email, and interviews were then scheduled via email at a time and place of the participants' choosing.

Limits on other demographics included identifying as female, being between the ages of 30 and 40 years old, speaking fluent English, and living in or near London, Ontario. This age range was chosen because it reflects a time in women's lives when prescribed gender roles become personalized and pronounced through choosing or not choosing marriage, motherhood and/or career, and the ways physical activity and exercise are either present or absent in the resistance and/or reinforcement of women's master narratives may prove significant in dissecting and rewriting such narratives.

Recruitment yielded five eligible participants. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) prescribe a small sample size because of the large amount of data that is generated within narrative inquiry. The aim in qualitative research is to go in-depth into the information-rich data, rather than claim representativeness (Creswell, 2007). Three of the women are married, two of which have two children each, and the other has a newborn. The other two women have serious boyfriends, each with a child from a previous relationship. At the time of data collection, the women ranged in age from 31 to 36. Four of the participants are white. One is of Asian decent with adoptive white parents. One participant grew up in Australia and moved to North America as a young adult. The others were raised in Canada. Each woman has a post-secondary undergraduate degree, and four of the women also have at least one graduate degree.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed twice in a one-on-one setting within their homes or work offices. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with the shortest lasting 40 minutes and the longest lasting two and a half hours. To assist participants in telling their life histories from a physical activity and exercise perspective, they were asked to complete the Life Book Activity (Appendix G), which consists of one sheet of paper with the numbers one to 100 making two columns. Participants were asked to think of their life as a book, an autobiography, and imagine how they might divide it into chapters. Using the column of numbers to represent years of their lives, participants were asked to mark on the paper where the chapters would start and finish and to provide them with titles. This is a version of an activity designed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) with the age range altered to encompass 100 years in order to investigate how the

women imagined their lives in the future with regards to physical activity. To avoid confusion while referencing participants' chapters of the Life Book Activity and chapters of this dissertation, chapters in the Life Book Activity will henceforth be referred to as 'periods' – a playful nod to the women's shifting and embodied identities and the often striking finality of each phase's end.

The Life Book Activity provides a consistent structure of storytelling across all participants, but it does not necessarily impact the richness of data pertaining to narrative form, as participants were encouraged to expand on their 'periods' in any order they chose and because the organization of 'periods' provided an additional outlet for the creation of rich data. I describe the interviews as semi-structured because of the format used, but there was very little structure provided beyond the Life Book Activity, which is consistent with narrative interviewing (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 2000).

Informed consent was obtained and demographic information, including age, self-identified race/ethnicity, education, income, and marital status was collected at the beginning of the first interview using the Demographic Information Questionnaire (Appendix C). Current physical activity behaviours, including type of activity, time spent, and level of intensity, were also collected on this questionnaire. This information provided the cornerstones upon which I built up an understanding of each individual woman. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The second interview was slightly more structured, as I asked clarification questions regarding information from the first interview in an attempt to go deeper into the participants' experiences.

Transcripts were provided to participants to ensure the accuracy of information and offer the opportunity to remove any parts of the interviews that participants were not

comfortable being included in the study. None of the participants wished to remove any part of the transcripts. Member checking, the practice of having participants approve of study findings, was not used because it is understood that analysis is an interpretive process of which the researcher takes ownership (Chase, 1996).

Reflexivity is the process of understanding how the researcher's lived experience and means of understanding the world around her influence the research process – from topic chosen to study design, analysis, interpretation, and representation (Morrow, 2005). Writing the autoethnography in Chapter Three before data collection began worked as reflexive practice because it allowed me to bring my own ideas, beliefs, and experiences regarding physical activity to the forefront of my mind and share them in a transparent manner with the reader. I also maintained an informal dissertation log throughout the data collection and analysis process. I wrote an entry after each interview regarding my initial reaction to the interview, highlighting what seemed most important, meaningful, emotionally evocative, or surprising, and then considered what part of me regarded the interview as such and why. These entries allowed me an awareness of my own feelings and the ways my lived experience may be colouring my understanding in a certain manner. They also assisted me during the writing process as I reflexively wrote myself into the text, placing myself, for example, back in the interview setting, as in Rebecca's narrative in the previous chapter.

Structural Data Analysis

The technique I used to categorize the data in Part One of the findings is based on Brock and Kleiber's (1994) study on the stories of elite college athletes' career-ending injuries. They searched for structural patterns within the stories and subsequently derived

from the data the sequential narrative chapters that encompass the experiences before, during, and after a career-ending injury. From their analysis, Brock and Kleiber (1994) are able to shed light on their narrative questions:

What are the effects of a disrupted life narrative – of illness – on the person’s identity and self-esteem?

Are there clinically relevant patterns in the stories of illness?

What role does culture, or the patient’s ‘world,’ play in the construction/presentation of illness narratives? (p. 415).

I was particularly drawn to the second and third questions, wondering if my participants’ life histories might hold patterns that are relevant to health promoters, and if gender played a role in those patterns as part of my participants’ ‘worlds.’ This approach also seemed relevant because of my use of the Life Book Activity; participants had already divided their narratives into periods, and it made sense to examine if there were patterns in the timing of those periods or in their content.

Because I had already analyzed each participant’s data holistically for the purposes of the previous chapter, I was extremely familiar with each woman’s life history before looking across participants. I charted each woman’s life events and emergent themes into their respective periods and lined them up with the other women in order to compare both the timing of period designations and the content of the periods. In a couple of instances, two periods were collapsed into one because there was no distinction within the content between the two periods – the participant’s explanations of both periods were the same. Then I looked across the chart to see what themes emerged in each period that all or almost all participants shared, making note of who did not share the theme and why. I provide my own titles that describe the major theme within each

period, and I also offer a title chosen from those provided by the participants in the Life Book Activity, choosing the participant's title that best described the major theme of that period.

Thematic Content Data Analysis

For the thematic content analysis, transcripts were submitted to a descriptive, hermeneutic treatment (Lieblich et al., 1998). In the previous chapter, I constructed narratives based on the plot of each woman's life history, moving from elements to stories in what Polkinghorne (1995) refers to as *narrative analysis*. In this chapter, I move in the opposite direction from stories to common elements in what Polkinghorne (1995) calls *analysis of narratives*. In this case, the narratives *are* the life histories. By moving in both directions, I gained considerable understanding of both the unique, individual messages (narrative analysis) and the more abstract, general knowledge of my participants' experiences (analysis of narratives) (Oliver, 1998). I worked inductively, allowing the themes to emerge from the narratives, rather than placing the data within predetermined theoretically conceptualized themes (Sparkes, 1999).

This process is circular and iterative, and it involves many readings and re-readings of the text in question followed by suggesting possible themes, sorting the text into these themes to check for fit, suggesting new themes, returning to the text to test for fit, and so on (Lieblich et al., 1998). For example, after many readings of each transcript and completing the holistic and structural analysis, I had a sense that running was valued more highly than other forms of physical activity by most or all participants. I allowed this piece of understanding to sit with me as a possible theme while I re-read each transcript, looking specifically for parts of the transcript that had anything to do with

running or the worth/value/legitimacy of other forms of physical activity. These sections of the first transcript were copied and pasted electronically into a new document. As I read the subsequent transcripts from the rest of the participants and copied and pasted their transcript sections into the new document, the theme was adjusted and further developed to give it context and meaning and to ensure it did indeed describe the participants' experiences. For example, gym workouts were added as another activity that is valued above others, and an association was drawn between the value of an activity and the intention of participating in that activity. While each transcript was re-read in order to look for a specific theme, the formation of each possible theme happened simultaneously with other possible themes. Some possible themes became part of another theme because of its strong relation to that theme. For example, the perceived difference between exercise and physical activity became part of the high value placed on running and gym workouts because of the ways the participants consciously or subconsciously related these two activities to their definition of exercise.

This process was long and messy with many adjustments made to tentative themes. Working in a circular fashion – always returning to the data from my own theme-generating idea factory – allowed me to maintain flexibility to change or scrap a possible theme, to be open to new ways of thinking about physical activity, and to ensure the themes are representative of the women's life histories.

Findings: Part One

The stories of my participants are patterned. Each woman divided her life history in a similar manner, the periods being split at the same ages, give or take a couple of

years in some instances. The ages provided for the periods below are approximate. This pattern seems to be heavily influenced by the stages of formal education, emphasizing the role school experiences play in identity construction and perhaps the opportunity for social change through empowering physical education programs. There are shared themes among the participants in each period. I was indeed surprised by the extent of the similarities between the women, who are not representative of all women, and believe the parallels can perhaps be attributed, at least in part, to the women's childhood involvement in sport and their shared desire to lose weight. I include my own voice as researcher and subject within the periods to emphasize, through the difference of my experience, the myriad ways of Being woman, and to dispel the "polarities of coherence and diversity" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). The periods, which each woman decided to begin at approximately four years old, are structured as follows:

Period One: Embodied Being in the world, Ages 4-14

Rebecca's title: "Play and Discovery"

I chose Rebecca's title from this period because it highlights, through rose-coloured glasses, the innocence that childhood represents, or would represent in a perfect world. I'm taken back to my own childhood, and suddenly I can feel the prickle of grass on my bare feet as I playfully jump through air-bound streams spurting from a sprinkler. Giggles and screams accompany the frigid water that splatters on flailing limbs and one-piece bathing suits. There is a simplicity to the telling of my own and my participants' childhood moments, as play, sport, and physical activity all seem to intermingle in this taken-for-granted, childlike way of Being-in-the-world. Through play we discovered and

were a part of the *lifeworld*, existing in poetic, pre-reflective consciousness housed in bodies that were a part of us and connected us to each other and our often natural environments.

One can assume there were more complicated moments for my participants and myself. We all played competitive sport as youths and inevitably encountered failure, frustration, and fear, among other challenges most young athletes face, but we collectively recall a period of transparent play, either because things were indeed simpler then, or because the distance between now and then is paved in wistful longing. In our stories, physical activity during this time was for fun. The women describe participating in both informal play settings and organized sport environments in their schools or communities. These activities included baseball, tag, basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, rollerblading, ballet, hockey, track and field, and swimming. The images depicted by the women were described as social and influenced largely by parents.

Rebecca: So, toddler and into, like, school age, um, I would have been active outside and playing games. My mom was always good at keeping us busy outdoors and active in that way.

Gabriella: Ok. I guess I would say we'll start with the early years, and mostly what I remember would be a lot of physical activity, like, outside. So I would go rollerblading with friends when I was younger, and we would go outside and play baseball, and, um, we would play tag 'cause at that time I just thought running was just really fun. Um, so lots of physical activity outside, mostly with friends, mostly for fun. Um, then when I was in grade 2 I started playing basketball at school, so from then on it started to be more of a routine physical activity. So we would practice an hour to 2 hours per day, and then on weekends we would have up to a whole day of sort of games, and I did that through elementary school, so up until grade 8. So that was pretty consistent exercise, team oriented, plus track

and field, plus volleyball. So a lot of team sports, which just was really fun- a fun way to do physical activity.

Kate: So I guess, as I mentioned my dad being a Phys Ed teacher it was always what we did, so we spent a lot of time outside in that age range. Um, we, I mean, constantly were outside. I lived on a court, I lived with- on a court with probably 25 kids within my age range, so the moment we got home from school until the moment we went to bed, that's what we did. We went in for dinner and we went straight back outside, and we were playing baseball, hockey, soccer, tag, anything you could think of we pretty much played it, and then we all kind of moaned when our moms yelled at us at 8 o'clock and said it was time for us to come in for bed.

Period Two: Appearance makes an appearance, But not at practice, Ages 15-18

Kate's title: "Aiming for Success"

With the exception of Rebecca, whose involvement in sport was interrupted by severe injuries from a car accident, physical activity in this period became geared more towards structured, competitive sport, as described in Kate's quotation that follows. Kate played basketball, Gabriella played volleyball, Sam played hockey, and Janet rowed. Even Rebecca's physical activity acquired structure through rehabilitation programs. I chose Kate's title for this period because the loss of unstructured physical activity seems significant to the women's later struggles to find forms of physical activity they enjoy once their competitive careers are over. As I get further into their life histories and reflect on my own, it becomes clear that the lost structured sporting practices, which took up much of my own and my participants' time during this period, were not easily replaced with a return to unstructured play or physical activity.

During this shift from play to competition, or in Rebecca's case, play to rehabilitation, there also emerged a new bodily awareness, often a negative one. I experienced this shift too, as my teenaged body became grounds for constant criticism from others and myself. The normalcy of this criticism was regularly reinforced by media images of 'perfect' women coupled with the insecurities of changing adolescent bodies. My feet were too long, knees too knobby, butt too bubbly, arms too skinny, shoulders too bony, face too ugly, hair too curly, body too tall. Every inch of me had something to be fixed or improved upon and I often suffered from increasingly frequent out-of-body moments in which I saw myself through the eyes of the male gaze.

My participants described their unease with their new bodies in fewer terms – they perceived themselves simply as too heavy. Perhaps this really was their singular insecurity, or perhaps it is simply the one that is always waiting on their lips, ready to be spoken. We exist amidst a social saturation of weight loss discourses often shoved down women's throats along with our favourite shame-inducing dessert. By this period, Janet had developed a severe eating disorder that was exacerbated by her involvement in the weight-classed sport of rowing. Yet, Janet starved herself in order to row, rather than rowing in order to lose weight. She and three of the other women maintained their motivations for physical activity from the previous period – improving their skills, being part of a team, training and competing to win, and having fun. The link between physical activity and appearance had not yet been made. Sam is the exception. Midway through high school she began taking birth control pills to clear up acne, and she gained weight. Her physical activity became solely about weight loss; even hockey was simply “another

sweat session.” The first two quotations in this period demonstrate the shift to sport competition, and the third quote demonstrates the arrival of appearance awareness.

Kate: This is where I really spent the better part of my free time playing competitive sport. Um, I- basketball was my sport of dominance, I guess if you will, for my entire life. In high school I also did volleyball again, and I also did badminton just to keep myself busy and for fun. Um, but the majority of my time was spent playing basketball. Um, I played again high school and competitive, and so I would say 5 nights a week and most weekends I was playing basketball. Um, at least from the September to the kind of April part of the year, and then volleyball and badminton in that time frame as well.

Rebecca: I would talk about concepts about my body and I remember [teacher] saying, “You’re very self-aware, more self-aware than most kids are your age.” And, um, I remember feeling like- and that, that was my experience both physically and emotionally all throughout high school is that I had a different awareness ‘cause, I mean, you have a life and death experience, and you’re going to think differently about life.

Janet: My crew, we were technically the lightweight 4, but none of us were real lightweights. We all had to, like, literally starve ourselves to, like, get down to weight...And we thought we were, like, really fat, um, because of this bit here- that sounds really weird to say, but this bit here, this fat pouch [points to armpit area]. “Like, oh my god, like, it’s really huge, and look at our arms.” And I don’t know where we got this from, but we thought that basically if you were an appropriate level of skinny you could put a ruler between your hip bones and your stomach wouldn’t touch in the middle. Like that, I think it was from a magazine or something, which is crazy, but I think it was. Like, yeah, that your hip bones would protrude so much that there would be no touching, and that your boobs, that you couldn’t hold a pencil under your boob [laughs].

Period Three: Disembodied movement through desire for thinness, Ages 19-24

Sam’s title: “Obsession with Weight”

In the previous period, the women experienced a new awareness of how their bodies did not measure up to ideal beauty standards, but this awareness did not influence their physical activity experiences or motivations. In this period, the link between physical activity and appearance was not only realized, but it was embodied by the women to such a degree that it became deeply engrained in their perceptions of body movement. Not surprisingly, this association was forged as competitive sport ceased. Sam no longer played hockey, Kate's competitive basketball career ended, Janet quit rowing, and while Gabriella continued as a varsity golf athlete, her heart was in volleyball, which she now played recreationally. Even Rebecca lost the structure of her rehabilitation programs, leaving an opening for new, appearance-based motivations to creep in. Along with losing their former teams and the training and performance goals, attendance expectations, and sense of community that comes with being on a team, each of the women also experienced another major life change as they began post-secondary education.

In this period, my own life history veers away from the shared experiences of my participants. I also began post-secondary education, but my competitive career in track and field was just beginning and perhaps my continued identity as an athlete allowed me to maintain those non-appearance-based motivations for physical activity from previous periods. There is another seemingly important difference between my participants and I – our body types. My five participants do not share the same body type, but they each express a concern with their weight being too heavy, as Gabriella explained, “I’m never going to be a small girl.” I, on the other hand, am a small girl – tall, but quite thin. While I had many insecurities about my body, weight was never one of them, and you can’t use

exercise to get straighter hair or smaller feet or knees that are less knobby. My body size was likely an enormous factor in the prevention of that link between physical activity and appearance forming in my own mind.

For my participants, weight moved front and center, and for Sam and Janet, it became an obsession. Physical activity, diet, and body image became intertwined, leading to emotional ups and downs and cycles of gaining and losing weight, most notably with Janet, who continued to struggle with an eating disorder.

Janet: Ok, so then, like, basically, this cycle started, which went on for years, where I would restrict and exercise a lot, um, and I would keep going with that for as long as I could, and then I would usually start, like, bingeing and purging, and I couldn't sustain that for that long either, and then I would just not restrict anything and I would just eat, like, a lot.

Sam: I really think that was a huge turning point for, like, my body, and just how I felt about everything. I kind of got more depressed when I stopped sports, and school took over. So at that point it really just turned into working out at home, doing what I thought I had to do to lose weight, which was just pretty much over cardio, overdoing it... Like, I just wanted to be skinny. That's all I wanted, I just wanted to be skinny.

Period Four: Searching for wholeness, Ages 25-32

Sam's title: "Finding the Gym/Trainer"

I chose Sam's title for this period because I was struck by the sense that each woman was searching for something that would make them feel whole, accepted, and worthy. Body dissatisfaction continued for my participants, and amidst their pursuits for identity and reconnection with their bodies, each woman 'found' the gym – a version of the GoodLife facility I describe, admittedly in a less than positive manner, in Chapter 3.

Sam, Gabriella, and Rebecca pursued guidance from a personal trainer, either as a form of accountability to ensure they showed up and completed workouts or for instruction on how best to lose weight. As Sam was introduced to a new kind of workout that didn't rely on treadmills, she was drawn deeper into the fitness world, urged on by her rapidly changing appearance and her relationship with her trainer, who is now her husband. She competed in fitness competitions and modeling, which fueled her appearance-based motivations for physical activity. The other women found the gym was not enough; they struggled to maintain a routine, viewing the gym as something they should be doing, but finding it difficult to remain motivated. They began to look elsewhere for physical activity they found more fulfilling, while continuing their on-again-off-again relationships with the gym.

Although it was never explicitly described, an awareness of the connection between physical activity and mental health became evident for all of the women in this period. Sam realized that her participation in fitness competitions and modeling had left her with unrealistic expectations for her appearance that led to depressive bouts, while the other women realized the crucial role physical activity played in their maintenance of mental health. They began to experience improved wellbeing through activities including golf, yoga, recreational basketball, beach volleyball, walking with friends, rollerblading, and biking. All of the women experienced ups and downs with their weight and mental health as they attempted, consciously or unconsciously, to 'shed weight' as a motivation for physical activity. Sam seems to have experienced the most dramatic highs and lows, likely because of her involvement in fitness shows where participants dramatically cut weight before shows and often bounce back immediately following them.

Rebecca: Um, I was a part of personal training. Um, because the gym was right around the corner from my aunt and uncle's house where I lived. It was so easily accessible that it was like- and because I was trying to increase my self-esteem and that kind of thing, and ah, so I did personal training.

Gabriella: So I would do that two or three times a week with [trainer] from here, and then try and run, but again I would go through phases where I'd be like, "Ok, we're going to run three times a week, we're going to weightlift twice a week," and I would do really awesome, and then other periods where I would get really busy and then I wouldn't really go as much.

Rebecca: And it's funny because through this whole time I had- there was struggle with motivation on and off, but I always came back to at least being active in some way. Walking and that kind of thing because it feels good, and I knew it felt good, and knew that, you know, from having been on the sleeping meds and then not being on the sleeping meds that I needed that, right?

Sam: Like, that's when I- my first show, I guess. And I lost a lot [of weight]. I really liked how I looked, but then right after I bounced back. And then I did another show. I lost a lot, and then I bounced back. And I was always very, very depressed between shows. Like, I hated how I looked. And now, right now, just having a baby 6 months ago, I could look back at those pictures between shows and, like, oh my god, I looked awesome, but at the time I couldn't see that. Like, to me I just looked awful. And I did put on more weight than I should have, but I definitely had a lot of lows right here.

Period Five: Appearance to function: Re-embodiment in return to sport, Present

Janet's title: "Reclamation"

Janet's title for this period, "Reclamation," is not only applicable to the women's return to self-fulfillment through physical activity, it also sheds light on their critical awareness of their journeys, how they have been influenced by dominant exercise discourses, and how they can now attempt to resist disempowering social expectations. A

process of re-embodiment is evident in this period, as the focus on physical activity shifted to function and feeling, although the connection to appearance lingers for all of the women to varying degrees. As mentioned earlier, the association with appearance, specifically the desire for thinness, was extremely fixed in their thinking and was not likely to disappear without struggle.

For Sam and Kate, the experience of pregnancy and childbirth seems related to this shift, but in different ways. Sam remains unhappy with her present weight, but admits that she must “give [her]self a break” because she just had a baby and is still breastfeeding. Her focus on weight is still grounded in physical appearance – she tries on this one pair of jeans everyday to see if they fit, but this focus is also taking on a functional aspect as she considers the ways being heavier negatively effects her ability to succeed in CrossFit workouts and eventually competitions. Kate, alternatively, describes the perceived unfavourable changes her body has experienced as a result of two pregnancies with acceptance and a respect for the capabilities of her childbearing body. All of the women, to varying degrees, appear to be actively constructing themselves around new measures of success that have more to do with happiness and acceptance and less to do with ideal beauty.

Sam: So now it’s more about how I function. After having a baby it’s a little bit different.

Like, I definitely feel like I’m still 20 pounds heavier than normal. So I’d like to lose that weight, and that’s still a goal of mine, but I’m nursing too, so I don’t know if that’s a realistic goal at the moment. I just have to get good at Olympic lifting and then hopefully the weight will fall off later.

Janet: I’ve, like, reclaimed my identity as being a strong person, not necessarily like a cardio fit person. But yeah, I don’t know. Um, and I think that I get respect at my gym because, like, I’m not- I’m far from being the best, but I’m decent. Like, I’m

in the- I'm on the team, right. Like, we're all, like, good to some degree or another, and um, so I have, like, respect from my, like, fellow teammates and stuff, which I guess I enjoy, but um, yeah, it doesn't- physical size isn't so important. It's just, yeah, you perform well or not, so yeah.

Period Six: Role models: Using them and becoming them in future visions of the self and motherhood, Future

Gabriella's title: "Becoming a Mom"

Gabriella's title seemed appropriate for this forthcoming period because all of the women, those with children and those thinking of future children, described motherhood as the only significant potential barrier to physical activity. According to the women, this barrier will potentially manifest in time and energy constraints. Motherhood was also described as a potential motivator for physical activity, as the women want to be good role models for their children by maintaining active lifestyles and teaching their children the value of physical activity and sport. These values include a sense of community within a sport team, feeling good about oneself, challenge and achievement, good health, and for some, avoiding teasing from other children or negative feelings about weight.

All of the women see themselves being physically active in the future and well into their senior years. These visions of their future selves are based on either older relatives they have that are physically active, or on older individuals they witness taking part in the same activities they currently participate in.

Kate: Ok, I definitely do imagine myself being physically active. Um, I think that's just something that I feel importantly about and I know all the health benefits and things like that, so and it's kind of how I grew up, so it's what I know, and I also want to pass those, um, things onto my kids, so it's something that I know I'll be

committed to maintaining at least a healthy lifestyle. Um, in terms of barriers, I would see the next 5 years or so I would see just the challenge of rearing a child or young children being a challenge. Um, in terms of energy, time, and those sorts of things, I mean, they're still at pretty needy ages, so you know, it's not like I can just pick up and leave and go for an hour run, you know, right before they go to bed or something like that. So I would say that's kind of a challenge for the very foreseeable future. Um, I think one of the challenges that will present itself shortly thereafter is, my hope anyways, is that my kids will love sport as much as I did, and so I'm hoping that they will find something that they're really passionate about, but consequently that can be very time consuming. So, um, perhaps the challenge of, you know, being committed to driving them and taking them to practices 4, 5, or 6 times a week and that sort of thing, um, might, you know, take away time from my ability to do it. Um, that said, I think that the older they get, the more independent they get, so hopefully that will allow me a little bit more flexibility in my schedule to be able to, um, commit to a little bit more of a consistent routine around exercise.

Gabriella: So I definitely want it to be a part of my life. I'll continue to play volleyball with my girlfriends for as many years to come as we can. There's a team in our league that the women are- I think the oldest one is 58, and we all together hope that we will be playing until then because it's social, because it's exercising without realizing your exercising really. Um, I guess I see myself continuing to play basketball. It may get a little difficult in the next few years thinking about having a child of my own. What I'm hoping is to be able to at least modify activities, walk, hopefully weightlift when I get back into it. Um, just to stay healthy and of course try not to gain a million pounds.

Findings: Part Two

Common themes emerged across participants that shed light on the ways the women conceive of physical activity and negotiate social expectations and dominant discourses in their daily lives. These themes include *A hierarchy of activities*, *The*

triangle of exercise, diet, and appearance, and The importance of social influencers.

Gender is present within each theme through the pervasive pressure to achieve or subvert ideal beauty.

A hierarchy of activities

Rebecca states, “See, I’ve sort of always been active, but with a different focus. Sometimes it was play and sometimes it was for, like, a purposeful restructuring everything.” The purposeful restructuring she refers to is related to her rehabilitation following her car accident; yet, her words strike me as applicable to all of my participants whose intentions for body movement fluctuate between play, fun, and enjoyment, which includes competition, and the ‘restructuring’ of their bodies to meet appearance-based ideals. The intent or motivation seems to influence the type of activity chosen, how it is framed in memory, and whether or not it is even worthy of recounting in a physical activity life history. Highlighting some of the many reasons she participated in physical activity, Gabriella says, “Um, some of it was for weight loss, and some of it was just a social thing just to go with other people, and some of it was just because I felt better.”

There is a distinct emphasis on the perceived importance of participating in two types of physical activity: workouts done at a gym and running. These activities are viewed as the most legitimate or valued forms of physical activity, and it is taken for granted that they *should* be a part of everyone’s physical activity routine. Janet describes her intention to start running again despite the fact that she finds no enjoyment in the activity:

And I kind of hate to say it, but I'm going to probably have to start running again. I fucking hate running. It's awful. So after I did my half marathon, I was like, I'm never running again. This is the worst thing ever.

As a health professional, Gabriella is critical of the view that running and working out at a gym are the only ways to be active:

And there's gonna be something that everyone can do, they just have to search and not have that idea that they need to exercise and go to the gym and they need to run.

However, from a personal perspective, she continues to get caught up in precisely that manner of thinking, stating later on:

And I should get back to my weight lifting, but I haven't done that yet.

She continues later in the interview:

And lately, um, the start of the year I started doing a plan for, like, losing weight, so I was at the gym, like, 3 times a week and I would be on the treadmill.

Still later:

I decided that I really needed to get my weight down, so I started running on my own and doing weight lifting on my own.

For Gabriella, and the other women as well, there is a strong association between these two activities and weight loss. Incidentally, running and working out at the gym are also the activities the women, excluding Sam, struggle to maintain motivation for. There is a stark contrast between the women's attitudes towards running and gym workouts as opposed to playing recreational sports, for example. Kate states:

Sport has always been, like, it's made me exercise in a really, really fun way, and when I go to the gym I don't necessarily, depends on what I'm doing, have that same, like, 'Oh, I just feel so wonderful having fun lifting weights' type thing. I don't have that same love for it... Yeah, I have no problem

whatsoever to get to basketball twice a week. None whatsoever. Even when I was breastfeeding and I had to feed a baby and then get to basketball, I just made it happen. Ah, now, I mean, it's summer so I'm not playing, but like getting to the gym 3 days a week, it's just more of an effort because, for me, exercise was just always part of what I did, um, and me just going to the gym, I just don't have that same pleasure. Like, I just, I thrive much more on sports than I do on just standard working out type things, so it becomes more of a challenge for me to get there.

Gabriella also distinguishes between playing sports and working out at the gym:

I just felt like there were- like I had said before, there are certain activities that I do, so the organized sports with the teams, that stuff has continued on from when I was younger, and that's what I enjoy a lot- just spending time with friends even if we have busy schedules. And those, like basketball and volleyball, those are sort of ways to do exercise that you don't feel like you're actually exercising, so it's a bonus. And like I said, there are certain weeks where things are busy and exercise gets put low on the priority list, so I feel like, 'Ugh, exercise is awful, and I don't want to go to the gym, I don't want to lift weights.'

It seems, for Gabriella, almost as if exercise is inherently awful, and one must disguise it in the more pleasant form of sport. The other women, excluding Sam, echo a future intention to return to the gym and running, despite their lack of motivation or enjoyment in such activities.

The gym has become the epicenter of fitness culture, a place where bodies are sculpted through disciplinary behaviours that turn individuals into consumers of fitness and health. The walls of the gym create this separate space where fitness is practiced during a specific time of day and in particular types of clothing to the point where activities done outside of the gym seem to count less or are considered less valued forms of physical activity. Kate says:

Um, and I would say that in my early university days I wasn't that active. I mean, it was more incidental activity. You know, I was walking a lot more, but I wasn't making an effort to go to the gym six days a week, or anything like that.

Kate's description seems to emphasize the difference between physical activity and exercise, placing exercise above physical activity and within the gym, reinforcing the idea that individuals must be active within this specific space in order to meet fitness culture standards. Rebecca also seems to perceive herself as less physically active when she is participating in activities outside of the gym, even going so far as to label a period of her life on the Life Book Activity as "Inactive" before describing what was actually an active lifestyle:

Yeah, I guess I called it [Period in Life Book Activity] "Inactive" because I feel like I wasn't really doing anything, and yeah, there wasn't a lot of activity as far as running and that kind of thing. It was more just laid back...And I didn't join a gym, but I do remember walking quite a bit. Um, and we did a little bit of rollerblading with my boyfriend. Um, but that wasn't- that was another really inactive time...But I was working in a really active- so I was on my feet all day, walking on concrete floor in steel-toe boots for eight hours a day, 40 hours a week, and I worked in the windows and doors department, so I was lugging, like, 36 inch doors, steel doors [laughs]. And would- like, I always cross-trained in the lumber department and that- the job was active. It was exhausting by the end of the day.

Rebecca seems to realize, as she describes her life during the period she titled "Inactive," that she was indeed physically active, just not within the space of the gym or as a runner.

Along with working out at a gym, running is also perceived as something individuals *should* be participating in. Even participating isn't enough – being a runner is a sought after identity that requires a specific level of ability, as Janet describes:

'Cause it's, like, not a natural thing to do, like, run for hours for a really long way. Um, for the half marathon specifically- I've always hated running, and I was like, well maybe I'm not running far enough 'cause I'd only ever run 5k before [laughs], and I was like, maybe I need to run further and kind of like discover the love that everyone has for running 'cause everyone loves running so much and there's obviously something wrong with me that I don't love it and I actually really hate it. And like, well you know, because of all the training that I'll have to do, like, I'll just love it more and I'll turn into, like, I'll magically turn into, like, a runner. It didn't happen.

Despite having run 5k per day for a period of time, completed a half marathon, and having been a member in a running group, Janet does not qualify herself as a runner, and this perceived failure leads her to believe there is in fact something wrong with her.

Sam represents a shift away from distance running as a measure of fitness and points to a new, emerging hierarchy in fitness culture that places circuit or CrossFit style workouts above more traditional gym routines:

And then, um, we never use the actual machines at the gym that you see a lot of people on. He's [trainer] always had me do the squat rack or free weights. It was never, I dunno, whatever those machines are that you just sit on. It was always something different and dynamic, and he also did a lot of circuit training, and that's kind of where he introduced me to Crossfit.

She looks back at her years spent running for hours on the treadmill as wasted effort because she did not attain the weight loss results she desired:

Um, I've come more to terms now that what I eat is going to influence how I look for sure, more than any exercising I can do. So I can run all I want. Like, there's a lot of fat marathon runners out there. Like, not real marathon runners, but like, recreationally. Like, that's not going to do anything for you. If your diet is bad then you're not going to look the way you want to look.

Although Sam expresses distaste for distance running, her assumption that the only reason to run long distance is to lose weight reinforces the notion of running as a disciplinary behaviour performed through a fear of fat. The idea of a “real marathon runner” versus a fat one represents the ubiquitous conflation of thinness and fitness that the other women also describe, seemingly unknowingly.

Triangle of exercise, appearance, diet

Some of the women demonstrate a critical awareness of the conflation of thinness and health or fitness, such as Janet, who says:

I don't think that you have to be a certain shape to be healthy.

However, they often perpetuate the notion that fit cannot be fat when describing their bodies. Returning to the period of her life Rebecca labeled as “Inactive,” she says:

Um, and the other reason I call this “inactive” is because I gained ton of weight, but I was always doing something.

For Rebecca, the connection between gaining weight and being inactive is assumed even though it did not actually exist during this period of her life. She continues:

I was always, like, I wouldn't say pudgy, but not, not fit. Like, I was strong 'cause, I mean, I was, like, cleaning horse stalls and working with the horses and even with playing ball I had a good arm and I was strong, but I mean, I wasn't thin per say.

As a chiropractor, Gabriella expresses an extra layer of meaning added to her appearance:

I think if people come in and they look at me and they think, “Wow, she doesn't ever walk, or she doesn't ever look like she cares about what she eats,” then they're less likely probably to listen to what I'm going to say. That doesn't mean that I want to be perfect in terms of my size or eating-wise,

which some people in my profession do strive to be that way, but I always feel like if I look healthy, and I tell them what I do to be healthy, and it's relatable to them, they might be more likely to do it versus someone who looks like it's unachievable to be that fit, or their diet is so crazy that no one would be able to follow it. So I definitely have an influence on people, and at certain times I realize, okay people are looking at me, I should probably make sure that I'm doing more, versus other times when I think well it's okay. That's where my attitude fluctuates sometimes.

Gabriella simultaneously reinforces the idea that 'healthy' looks a certain way while acknowledging that being somewhat heavier may actually encourage her patients to take up physical activity.

The importance of social influencers

The most significant social influencers included friends and teammates, significant others, and parents. While significant others and parents influenced the women in both positive and negative thinking about their bodies and physical activity, friends and teammates were always described in a positive manner. Sometimes friends and teammates simply made physical activity more fun, and other times being part of a group created a sense of accountability, helping the women maintain their physical activity routines. Janet explains:

Um, I like doing it. So I've found that it is sustainable for me because I enjoy the people I lift with, so it's like a social thing too, and that's really important for me. Like, I have to like- it has to be more social, and I think that's part of the running thing. Um, so I enjoy seeing them and I enjoy doing the workout.

Rebecca describes the sense of accountability:

So, um, there were a few girls from the other dorm too that would get up in the morning and walk the cemetery. And they had it clocked, like, how many

kilometers it was through the cemetery. So it was neat again to sort of be a part of something that was active, but- and social at the same time with the other girls. There was a little bit of accountability there, which was nice.

The influence of the women's significant others is more complex in relation to their physical activity. For example, Gabriella describes how being in a relationship takes time away from physical activity, but also explains how it's nice to go for a walk with her boyfriend. For Sam, physical activity comes across as an important part of her relationship with her husband, who is also her trainer:

Um, I guess he's influenced me in the way that we do all of this stuff together. So we're still spending time together, but doing something good for ourselves, I guess. So it's not like you have to come home from work and give up time with your spouse to go to the gym. You can do it together. Saturdays and Sundays are his days off, so Saturday we always go to Crossfit class together. Same with Sunday, we do something together like that. So it's nice because we push each other. He can still- he does my programming still, so everything I do is kind of because of him.

Sam later describes the added pressure of being married to a personal trainer:

I still am a product of what he has implemented, like, program-wise and things like that. So I look at myself, I'm like, what do other people think when they look at me? I'm married to a trainer, and to me I look big right now. So I always wonder, like, do they think, like, I just don't care or I'm lazy, which I'm not. Like, I work my butt off, but I just can't seem to lose anything.

Sam's perception almost comes across as if her body is a representation of her husband's skills as a personal trainer. Her conflation of thinness and fitness lead to the impression that she might be letting him down through her weight. Her relationship might act as a motivator to be physically active with the goal of weight loss.

Parents also influence the women's perceptions of their bodies and physical activity in contradictory ways. Each woman described their parents as enabling and encouraging their physical activity and sport participation in childhood. For example, Kate says:

So my dad being a Phys Ed teacher ended up with 2 daughters, so [laughs]- I mean, it was always an important part of our lives. Like, my parents are both active. They, you know, they always golfed and that sort of thing. As adults, that's what I remember them doing when I was a kid. Um, so we were going to play sports; that was inevitable. It was just a matter of what sport we were going to play. That was kind of my dad's approach to things. But my parents were extremely supportive. It was, it was going to be a part of our lives. No matter what, that was just the reality of being born to my dad.

However, the women's parents also reinforce notions of ideal beauty. Janet's parents are the most extreme example, as she explains:

I tried to, like, lay out some rules with them that basically that subject was, like, off limits, and we were never to talk about, like, body image stuff ever again, but it just hasn't, it never worked. And so they do talk about it less, but it always creeps in. Like, even now, like, I'll be on the phone with them and they'll be like, "Oh, it looks like you've lost some weight or you've gained some weight in that picture of you weight lifting in, like, a skin-tight suit," or you know. I mean, they'll say, like, well done or whatever, but, like, um, yeah, that's what they're really focused on. So I don't know, they're both, they're both really into, like, being skinny. Like, it's, like, it's really, really important to them.

The influence of the other women's parents is more subtle. Gabriella explains:

I remember my mom would always say, like, 'Oh, you know, your body's so nice and athletic. Don't get like me,' or, 'Don't get like your sister with cellulite.'

Sam's father echoes such sentiments, as she describes:

But he used to always tell me when I was younger, like, 'Watch out, Sam, you stop working out or stop doing all these sports, you're gonna- and you keep eating like this, you're gonna be huge.'

Discussion

According to Whitehead & Biddle (2008), there is a significant decline in girls' participation in sport and physical activity during early adolescence. One of the reasons for this decline is an increased self-consciousness about one's body (Coakley & White, 1992). While my participants experienced this increase, it did not appear to influence their physical activity experiences during adolescence. Likewise, my participants were not affected by the numerous other social factors that have been shown to lead to declines in physical activity during puberty, including male dominance in physical education settings (Brooks & Magnusson, 2006; Everhart & Pemberton, 2001; Coakley & White, 1992; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001), the association of athletic traits with masculinity (Whitehead & Biddle, 2008), the perceived inability to be both sporty and feminine (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002), and lacking confidence in skill execution (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006). Only Janet brought up physical education without prompting from me, describing it in a neutral-to-positive manner. When asked specifically about physical education, the other women described positive experiences, such as being chosen quickly for teams, challenging the boys in the class, and being more skilled than most classmates. It appears that their relatively high level of physical literacy allowed them to experience belonging in a space that is typically male-dominated.

Findings from this study demonstrate that achievement in sport or physical literacy during childhood may influence women's abilities and confidence to take up

sport as adults, as each of the women has returned to competitive sport at some level. There are possible implications for health promoters. According to a ParticipACTION study (2016), children who possess good motor skills at age six are more physically active at age 26. Unfortunately, less than half of children meet the minimum recommendations for physical literacy levels in Canada with only 44% of children between eight and 12 meeting recommendations (ParticipACTION, 2016). This statistic is not surprising when considering the fact that only nine percent of children aged five to 17 meet the recommended guidelines for daily physical activity (ParticipACTION, 2016). One cannot improve her physical literacy if she is not physically active. Some health promotion strategies target parents to improve their children's physical activity levels, such as the "Think Again" campaign referred to in Chapter One. Recall that an evaluation of this campaign demonstrated that improvements in proximal factors, such as parental support, did not influence the distal outcome of children's physical activity levels.

As children spend such a large part of their day in school, Physical Education seems an ideal place to promote improved physical literacy, which may improve physical activity levels outside of school. Three quarters of Canadian schools report using a Physical Education specialist (ParticipACTION, 2016). As a former elementary school teacher and Physical Education specialist at a school within the remaining one quarter, I can attest to the lack of skill development promoted by non-specialist teachers, some of whom are physically inactive themselves, have never played organized sport, do not know the basic rules, strategies, or positions for common games, such as basketball, and

who are unlikely to spark a desire in students, excluding the ones who already love sport, to participate in organized or leisure time sport.

Reflecting on my experience coaching a grade eight girls' basketball team in a rural, northern community, I can remember the initial hesitation expressed by the girls regarding not only their right to be in the gym space, but their abilities to move athletically. They quickly learned they did not have to be talented athletes to enjoy a game of basketball. Simply learning the rules and positions shifted the activity from a sport to a game. Slowly, and with lots of encouragement, they also learned to move athletically, to take up space, to be physical, and to move quickly. It was an incredibly rewarding experience for me, and it is unfortunate that in my own experience as a young girl and then a teacher and coach that girls who do not express an athlete identity are simply not expected to understand how the game is played or to enjoy the game. My participants were lucky to identify as athletes during childhood and to feel that they belonged in the male-dominated world of sport, which may have led to their returning to sport as adults.

Even with specialist teachers, Physical Education may be a missed opportunity to promote lifelong physical activity due to its emphasis on traditional sports, rather than a more broad definition of physical activity that might meet the needs of students that aren't particularly interested in competition. While each of my participants did play competitive sport during childhood, perhaps a more varied array of physical activities may have served them well later in life, particularly when they retired from competitive sport. Each of the women struggled during this period, as the link between body movement and body ideals became cemented. It took them years of trying to lose weight

through physical activity to finally return to sport and find enjoyment in body movement once more.

The women's retirements from sport happened similarly; they reached the peak of their development and could not continue to compete at the same or a higher level. Rebecca, who continued playing softball after recovering from her car accident, moved away for post-secondary education and found herself without a team to play on. Kate shared a similar experience, perceiving herself to be not quite good enough for varsity basketball and not sure how to break into the intramural community at her university, she too was without a team. Gabriella, who did play on a varsity volleyball team, became frustrated with her lack of playing time coupled with the difficult workouts that she did not enjoy. She switched to varsity golf, but her level of commitment to training was not nearly as high as it had been previously for volleyball. Still, she maintained high physical activity levels until her varsity career ended. Janet continued rowing for a couple of seasons after high school, but felt like she didn't fit in with the older crowd in her club and quit. It's almost as if each woman had no place to go – not sure how to be recreational athletes and not quite good enough to continue their training efforts or make the step up to the next level of their sport.

It is likely that competitive sport provided a number of things that supported the women in maintaining an active lifestyle, including structure, identity, and opportunities for development and achievement. Without the buffer of competitive team sport, each woman began the cycle of periods of physical activity interspersed with periods of decreased activity or sedentariness. While, so-called 'yo-yo' dieting has long been understood to cause health problems, yo-yo exercising is also emerging as risky health

behaviour. Here, in this period of instability, a history of participation in numerous forms of physical activity, rather than a single sport, may have helped the women transition out of competitive sport and into recreational sport or non-competitive forms of physical activity, such as hiking, swimming, or Martial Arts.

While research shows the decline in girls' sport participation during adolescence is in part due to a fear of being perceived as masculine (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Whitehead), none of my participants expressed a struggle to negotiate their femininity with their athleticism, although Sam described having to subvert her mother's and sister's fears that her back was too broad due to heavy weight lifting. Rather than succumbing to the social manufacturing of female docility, each woman described sport and physical activity as places where they belonged and experienced success. It appears that physical literacy and participation in competitive sport worked as buffers, allowing the women to find enjoyment and achievement in physical activity throughout their adolescences. They may have experienced the disembodied male gaze outside of physical activity during adolescence, but they continued to experience movement *through* their bodies, maintaining a focus on function during this time.

The exception to this preserved embodiment is Sam. Although she continued to play hockey throughout high school, her motivations for physical activity shifted dramatically midway through from training to weight loss. Sam described her sporty, childhood self as a 'tomboy' because she dressed in athletic wear and just wanted to play sports. Her self-appointed label reinforces the notion that sports are for boys. I sense her eating habits are also conceptualized as 'tomboyish,' as she described her carefree doughnut consumption:

I've never been a small eater. Like, I've just- I love food. So even when I was younger, I could get away with- my dad thought it would be funny to bring home, like, doughnuts, and me eat six doughnuts. Seriously, like, six big doughnuts. I would eat them in one sitting. And I wouldn't gain a pound, but I never even thought about it.

Sam's appetite comes across as part of her identity, an identity constructed in adolescence around tear-away track pants, the traditionally masculine sport of hockey, and being able to "eat like a guy," as she described, perhaps to impress her father. Her mental state during this time is reminiscent of a sprouting teenaged boy for whom it is normal to always be hungry and eating with "no disastrous physical or emotional consequences" (Bordo, p. 108). Sam also described herself as "a very late bloomer" who "just didn't have any body fat," and I sense from her a rejection of the stereotypical feminine, which includes fashion-awareness, aesthetic and artistic sport participation, refined peckishness, and voluptuous curves.

When, midway through high school, Sam gained weight after starting birth control pills to clear up acne, it was as if all the other parts of her identity were lost along with her slim, "tomboyish" body. I am intrigued by the possibility that Sam's initiation of food restriction coupled with a switch from hockey to the 'women's space' of the treadmill was an attempt to return to the innocence of her (tom)boyhood, rather than a reach towards feminine beauty ideals, as I initially assumed. Perhaps Sam's shift to exercising for weight loss was born of a desire to return to previously enjoyed male privileges concerning the body – to be a maker of meaning as opposed to the female bearer of meaning, to move unencumbered by scopophilic voyeurs painting her fragmented parts with blazon anatomique, to exist without an imposed 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1975; Martindale, 2001). This male privilege is conceivably shared with

some girls, and seems to end upon their unfortunate right of passage into womanhood that is their sexualization. Before Sam's 'late blooming' puberty, she was presumably not constrained by feminine expectation or objectified by the male gaze. Was her desire to return to her pre-pubescent self what Bordo (1993) refers to as a "defense against the femaleness of the body" (p.8), a boyish body ideal that precluded the male gaze?

This potential feminist protest, Bordo (1993) describes, is unfortunately complicit with the inequality it was designed to fight. Sam spent hour upon hour on the treadmill, hopelessly pursuing a former body at the cost of personal development and achievement through other means. As the feminine ideal has shifted within the last decade or so to necessitate a certain amount of muscle, it becomes less and less clear what Sam was aiming for when she pointed at a fitness competitor at her gym and said, "I want to do that." Had she succumbed to the imposition of male defined beauty, or was she continuing to challenge feminine ideals by building muscle? Either way, Sam recognizes that her participation in fitness competitions and modeling left her with a "warped view of [her] body." If there was a feminist protest to begin with, it certainly died out as she became heavily involved in the fitness world.

Sam's training for competition marked the start of diet restrictions. The aforementioned male privileges also concern food. Once our bodies become the object of socially acceptable sexualization, our consumption of food also becomes promiscuous affair, something to be controlled and suppressed à la Victorian principles of feminine behaviour (Bordo, 1993). Indulging our cravings is presumed naughty, maybe even akin to a woman who *cheats*, her tongue sliding sensually over her lips before she coquettishly nibbles the lower one. Or it's simply disgusting. No longer encouraged in

‘boyish’ feats of doughnut gorging – acting ‘like a boy’ isn’t cute anymore – grown women binge shamefully. Simultaneous to deviant, devilish, or disgusting, women’s appointed relationship with food becomes mashed up with the purity of motherhood and the private role of caregiver. Prepare the food, nourish others. I’m reminded of Sam’s assertion:

My body right now is basically to feed her. It’s all about her. And I chose to do that. I could take the easy way out and- sorry, I shouldn’t say that ‘cause it’s insulting to other women. I could take the easy way out and I could formula feed her, and then hopefully my hormones will balance out, but I just can’t do that.

Through motherhood, Sam began to accept, or at least tolerate, her body weight, urged on by cultural expectations regarding mothers and the morality of breastfeeding. But this tolerance has been a long time coming. Sam may have begun her quest to lose weight through physical activity in order to subvert stereotypical femininity, or perhaps not, but her entrance into fitness competitions and modeling, in which she posed in her bikini to be judged on her appearance may represent an acceptance of the form of femininity she once avoided. The desire to look a certain way drew her in to new types of workouts, and the link between physical activity and appearance was strengthened.

This link, which becomes a triangle when diet is added to the desire for thinness through exercise, maintained a strong presence throughout the study. For each participant, the conflation of thinness and fitness/health, drew them to exercise in ways that were not necessarily enjoyable or rewarding to them, and therefore, not sustainable. How long can someone maintain a daily running routine when she “really fucking hates it”? While there are likely other dominant discourse factories informing the women’s perceptions of physical activity, they only described social media as an outlet that

influences (with resistance) how they think they should look and what kinds of physical activities they should be involved in, namely gym workouts and running. Gabriella also described social media, specifically Instagram, in a positive light. Female plus size Instagrammers allow her to see women who look like her being confident in their bodies. They also provide practical fashion advice, such as where to find stylish bathing suits for a plus size body. It appears there may be an opportunity for health promoters and mass media campaigns if the message can move beyond education and risk prevention, and instead begin to shift dominant discourses regarding women's bodies and physical activity.

The Sixth Participant

Each of the women in this study created narratives of their life histories of physical activity within a specific time and space they shared with me, the interviewer. I often questioned how my physical presence influenced what was said during the interviews, as I sat across from each participant, my long, slender legs tucked under my chair, and skinny, wiry arms resting on my lap. Were the women, each of whom had struggled with her weight at some point in her life, editing their narratives based on the skinny person who was listening? At one point during our interview, Rebecca paused to think and then began, "I want to make sure I give you the information that you're looking for and not, you know, a lot of other details that you don't need." I wondered what she thought I was looking for, as she demonstrated what Gubrium and Holstein (1998) refer to as substantive monitoring – taking into account what is "locally relevant" in the creation of her narrative (p.173). But what was locally relevant within our brand new researcher-subject relationship?

During Sam's second interview, she demonstrates shifts in "narrative footing" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998), her personal position in regards to the topic. She says:

I'd be lying if I said social media doesn't affect me at all. Um, it's very hard to know, like, what truth is, and I always try to tell myself, like, when you're looking at, like, Instagram. Like, I do follow some of the, like, some girls that compete in the fitness competitions still 'cause I like to see what they're doing, but- and I keep telling myself in my head, like, would I be happy training like that? No, not really. Like, I don't want to go and do bicep curls and that kind- like, it's just not- I tried that, and I'm not happy with that. I want to be training for something. But I still look at it, and I still think to myself, like, "Ugh, I wish I looked like that." Of course. There's nothing that feels as good as being fit. I mean, I'm, like, I'm just saying, you look better in clothes, you look better in your workout clothes, everything. And people are look-driven now. Like, you can't tell me, you cannot sit there and tell me that looks don't mean anything- like, looks, how somebody looks doesn't mean anything. Not- it shouldn't mean anything. I shouldn't say that, sorry, but like, oh that's bad, that's bad to say. It kind of does though. Like, when your, your appearance- now, people judge, everyone judges.

"I'd be lying" serves as a "prefatory linkage" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998) by providing the sense that what she is going to say is something she would prefer wasn't true. Sam wishes social media did not have an affect on how she feels about herself, but it does, an experience she shares with the other participants who also point the finger at social media for its ability to encourage appearance-based comparisons to others. This linkage establishes Sam's narrative footing; she is critical of the women on Instagram who promulgate an ideal female body and the exercise and diet formula necessary to achieve such a body. In describing her desire for function over appearance, she says, "I want to be training for something." Mid-explanation, however, Sam shifts her narrative

footing. “Of course,” she says, referring to her desire to look like the fitness models on Instagram, as if this desire is a given. When she continues, “There’s nothing that feels as good as being fit,” she reverses, or at least muddles, her original desire for improved body function, as she conflates fitness with thinness. “You look better in clothes,” she explains, continuing, “And people are look-driven now,” as she now positions herself as accepting appearance-based ideals. She continues to monitor herself, taking into account what is acceptable to say, and apologizing when she thinks she has stepped out of bounds. I wonder how she has conceived of the boundaries of our conversation, and I think some of her back and forth results from my own unintended elusiveness, which causes her to guess what is locally relevant.

What is considered locally relevant by my participants is also certainly influenced by dominant discourses surrounding women’s bodies, eating habits, and exercise participation. My own exposure to male-defined ideal beauty on social media is offset by my choice of pages to follow, such as “Fit is a Feminist Issue,” a blog and article sharing page that constantly subverts technologies of domination through stories and images of physically active women of all ages, sizes, races, sexualities, and abilities in many different forms of sport and physical activity. My intentional social media consumption that reflects my critical feminist situatedness meant that I was sometimes surprised by the ways my participants conflated health, fitness, and thinness.

I question whether or not these ideas would have been shared with an interviewer of larger size, highlighting the ways narratives are co-constructed and the multiple layers of meaning that are created. The narratives were filtered through my own lived body experiences as a researcher, a woman, and someone who, like them, has embodied

shifting identities related to sport, physical activity, and exercise. As previously stated, the aim of narrative inquiry is not to claim representativeness or generalizability, but rather to create meaning from rich texts that describe a phenomenon (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

My own life history does not fit the structure shared by my participants' histories, and I have included myself in the period descriptions to highlight the differences between us, which I believe are largely related to the social consequences of having different body types and my prolonged competitive involvement in sport. I have been privileged in my ability to associate physical activity solely with empowering elements of motivation – skill development, training to win, being part of a team, experiencing the joy of body movement – for most of my life. These motivations fade away from my participants' life histories in Period 3 and are replaced to varying degrees with the desire to lose weight.

While I have never experienced such a desire, I can't help but think of my autoethnography in Chapter 3, in which upon retirement from competition in track and field I began to wonder what my new motivation for physical activity would be. My atrophying muscles, which were replaced by cellulite, began to seep into my consciousness through dominant discourses of ideal beauty. For the first time in my life, the link between appearance and physical activity started to form, and I used my critical feminist awareness to aggressively resist that formation. This wasn't a one-time act of resistance, but a daily practice of reminding myself how technologies of dominance function to oppress women, emphasizing fictitious flaws and then selling the magical remedy. I refuse to drink the punch, and I know my ability to do so is born not only of my feminist situatedness, but also my lifetime of sport participation, through which I

learned on a daily basis that my body can do awesome things beyond modeling an object of male desire or criticism. My participants also demonstrated a critical awareness that influenced the shifting meanings of physical activity throughout their lives.

Critical Awareness and Resistive Acts:

Shifting Meanings of Physical Activity and the Creation of Self

Noticeable shifts were obvious in the meanings of my participants' physical activity experiences throughout their lives beginning with play, then sport competition, weight loss, a search for fulfillment and wholeness through physical activity, reclamation of their bodies for themselves, and physically active futures as mothers. Just as each woman's life history narrative was enabled and constrained by available social scripts or narrative resources, so too is her gendered body fashioned by cultural constraints and her historical situation. Indeed, the body *is* an historical situation through its reproduction of corporeal styles that, while distinct from the materiality of the body, reinforce the prescribed acts or dramatizations that are culturally acceptable for that body (Butler, 1988). Merleau-Ponty (1962) claims that the body is also a set of possibilities; there is no inherent essence of woman, and the ways women express their womanhood and/or femininity can be agentic, while, again, partially determined by her historical situation. This agency is described by Markula (2003), as the 'folding in' of the outside, the ways we choose to interact with technologies of dominance in an aesthetic self-stylization, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Gender is fluid, reproduced through repeated acts, dramatizations, or performances of the body (Butler, 1988). Femininity is not a seamless thread that connects the body to some pre-existing essence, but a continuous project of individual

acts through which the personal becomes political (Butler, 1988). Constrained by social fictions, we often embody disempowering feminine expectations, ingesting myths of female frailty, passivity, and lack of coordination and athleticism when we ‘throw like a girl’ or move in other inefficient patterns (Young, 2005). These movements reinforce the notion that athleticism is a male trait and sport is a male space where women are not capable of succeeding. The idea that gender is an ongoing project, constructed through repeated acts, means that there is opportunity for individuals to challenge these social fictions. Women can *do* gender through the active process of the body until former possibilities become the new historical situation to which women refer in their behaviour choices.

My participants have been *doing* gender throughout their lives, both reinforcing traditional femininity and reconstructing new femininities through their bodies. Their critical awareness, for the most part, does not appear to come from feminist consciousness, but from a feminist standpoint – from their bodies. Each of the women expressed periods of tension between dominant exercise discourses that led them to the gym and a resistant search for fulfillment that subsequently lead them towards a variety of physical activities, including yoga, beach volleyball, recreational basketball. While they usually do not articulate a critique of dominant femininity and exercise discourses, the women’s actions speak volumes. Each one of them has found her way back to competitive sport – Rebecca in softball and a desire to compete in Olympic lifting, Sam in Crossfit, Gabriella in beach volleyball and basketball, Janet in Olympic weight lifting, and Kate in basketball. They have each gone on a search, whether consciously or not, to

find activities that make them feel good, mentally and physically, despite dominant discourses.

For these women, notions of female frailty or stereotypically feminine sports are not an issue. They revel in their physical strength, creating their own femininities through bodies that increasingly unapologetically take up traditionally male-dominated spaces. I imagine the women building bridges back to their sporting pasts. Underneath each bridge flows a stream of oppressive appearance-based ideals that less and less splashes over the bridge. If the women keep building, dominant discourses won't be able to reach them.

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CHAPTER SIX

Fighting Off the Disembodied Bear

Introduction

In track and field, specifically the long sprints and middle distances, there often comes a point in the race when each runner ‘hits the wall.’

The parachute flies out behind me
 A startling resistance
 Triggers a flash of panic
 Not lasting long enough to think
I went out too hard
 But I know it in my gut
 It flings itself upwards, *fuck*
 Ignore it, refocus
 Sight becomes vital to motion
If I couldn't see the line
 Searing pain in hammies, glutes
 Now the calves
 Conceding to heels smashing ground
 Abdominals break up to escape the fire
 Triceps picking up the slack
 Of jelly, wasted legs
 Fighting my failing body
 As faraway internal voices
 Forbid me to stop

Any knowledgeable spectator who has ever ‘hit the wall’ can easily recognize when it happens to another runner. I can imagine myself as a coach, watching my own athletes during that make or break moment, when they decide what kind of person they

are – quitters or finishers, weak or strong, moving or still – there is no in between. If I'm emotionally invested in the athlete's success or the race itself, my muscles will tighten, sweating fists will clench, my body will lean forward as if there is some ghostly connection between my athlete and I that wills my movement and energy into her body. If it's not an important race, my fellow track retirees and I will often find entertainment and humour in the temporary, self-inflicted pain of others. "Uh oh, she's got a refrigerator on her back," someone will chuckle, and someone else standing in another pod of spectators will playfully exclaim, "She's got a bear on her back!" It's as if the sight of tensed jaw and running-form-breakdown reminds us of our membership in this peculiar and exclusive club. After all, not every woman has run with a bear on her back. Has she?

Bordo (1993) begins *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* with a discussion on Schwartz's poem, "The Heavy Bear." In it, the bear plays metaphor for the body and its existence as a form outside of the self, but always *with* the self. The mind-body dualism highlighted in the poem reminds me of that moment in a race when a bear would jump on my back. The Zen instant of being in my body through a mind-muscle connection would be cracked wide open during that split-second-realization that my body was failing and it was only going to get worse. The bodily rejection of my frantic necessity to continue running fast leads to a disembodied self. My inner voice – *keep going, keep going, push harder* – sounds outside of me, as it latches onto my detached body, the *dysappearing* body that appears to its self only when it becomes dysfunctional (Frank, 2013).

My participants described their childhood physical activity experiences in a manner that expressed oneness with their bodies – not as selves shackled to ‘heavy bears’ that they were forced to drag around with them, but as intercorporeal beings that existed through physical play. As the girls entered adolescence, this Being became divided. For Rebecca, it happened in an instant. She was literally “split up the middle” as her internal organs were checked for bleeding under the bright hospital lights. For the others, the split was more gradual; their ‘heavy bear’ showed up more and more often as they became increasingly aware of their appearances and whether or not they met appearance-based ideals. The women spoke of their bodies during this period through description, rather than feeling, as if by this point in their lives they regularly floated outside of their encasements to look back and critique them through the eyes of others.

As their competitive involvement in sport ceased, the women left behind play and competition to take up work, the ‘fixing’ of their bodies, and their ‘heavy bears’ showed up to stay. Their physical selves became increasingly docile and malleable, as they began to govern themselves through exercise behaviour, literally shaping their bodies in attempts to look the way they are ‘supposed’ to look (Foucault, 1991). Instagram, Facebook, the endless pictures, image upon image of stereotypically beautiful women, coupled with ‘fitspiration’ and the now common practice of sharing workout pictures functioned as social control mechanisms to produce disciplinary behaviour – the women went to the gym.

Left unfulfilled by fitness culture and practices of self-objectification, each woman has begun a process of re-embodiment, letting go of the ‘heavy bear,’ and

reincorporating her body into her self. While each woman is at different stages of her personal journey, the knowledge each holds within her body is promising. Rebecca says, “And it’s funny because through this whole time I had- there was struggle with motivation on and off, but I always came back to at least being active in some way. Walking and that kind of thing because it feels good, and I knew it felt good.” It’s a lot easier to walk without a bear on your back.

Doing the Body through Metaphor:

A Performative Representation of Findings

Caster tapped her long fingernails on the glass, the plinking sound the only noise she had heard, aside from her breathing, all day. She wondered when she would get the chance to cut her nails, as she felt the whites of them vibrate with each tap.

A sudden jolt startled her out of the thoughtless song that her fingers had been playing. She was moving. The sensation travelled up from the bottom of her cell, through her feet, causing her body to sway. Bracing herself with outstretched hands on opposite glass walls, she could almost hear the rumbling beneath her, but not quite. Caster’s heart seemed to heave, as she spread her feet, bent her knees, and used tensed muscles to maintain her balance. Where were they taking her, she wondered, trying to imagine what was on the other side of this case.

The last image she had seen before the darkness was etched in her mind, and she replayed it now. Some kind of laboratory. There were no windows placed within the cement brick walls, but bright lights hung overhead, their glare wetting the rows of stainless steel tables. Each surface reminded her of the slide at her childhood playground,

the sun glinting off every dent made by careless rock throwers. She could feel the heat from the slide as she recalled the way she would point her toes and hammer her arms down to her sides, streamlining her body like a bullet. When her feet hit the ground, she was gone, the speed from her drop to earth transferred into legs that spun like noiseless propellers. Nothing mattered, but that she was running and no one could catch her. “Get Caster!” the other kids would yell, and they would form a flock behind her, dropping off one by one as they conceded their playground loss. Caster would plunge her shoulder towards the ground and swing back around to circle the others, who were bent over, hands on knees, and chests heaving. “Catch me! I’m it!” she would shout through a grin, as she momentarily slowed her pace to trick her friends into another futile attempt.

She sighed at the memory. Alone in the laboratory, she was encased in her glass box. It had one opaque wall that reminded her of the fake snow people sprayed in the corner of their windows at Christmas time. The wall had one indentation where her fingers could grasp the edge and pull out a drawer meant to serve as her bathroom. The outline of another opening had no handle and its purpose remained a mystery. Caster was unsure of how long she had been unconscious before waking up. She felt a flush of wind pushed down upon her every so often and assumed that was what was keeping her alive. She had stared upwards until her neck spasmed, trying to figure out where the air was coming from. There were no air holes and no doors. She didn’t know how she got in, or how she would get out.

After what felt like many hours, a shadow had come over her and she looked up to see a large, maroon blanket pass in front of some lights. It was being held up by a crane that grasped it in its center. Caster could tell it was very thick, maybe wool,

because no light passed through it. Her gaze followed it until it stopped directly above her, the crane released, and the material enveloped her glass case in darkness.

She suddenly felt cold and more alone than ever. Why was this happening, she thought, as her mind raced frantically. Her breathing became rapid, and she noticed the maroon blanket was moving, as tiny waves of light appeared and disappeared at the base of her cell where the blanket brushed against the floor. Were there people out there? She watched the play of light and darkness at her feet, both excitement and dread flowing through her. A shoe! There were people out there, she realized, and instinctively began to bang on the glass. "Help!" she screamed, but her voice was swallowed up by the still air around her.

Now she slumped to the floor, wondering halfheartedly if the vibrations beneath her might give her a clue as to where she was. She had been moving for quite some time now – an hour, maybe two? A bump knocked her head against the glass, and her hand automatically reached for the painful swelling that had formed at the back of her head. She rubbed it softly, circling through her thick, dark brown hair. Closing her eyes, Caster tried to take deep breaths, as foggy visions began to form memories in her fractured mind.

She had been running. Yes, she could feel the hard ground push back against her springy legs as the wind graciously parted to let her through. It had been a hot day at the beginning of summer, but she had worn heavy sweatpants and a T-shirt that read "Killer" on the front, hoping to avoid any attention. But still they whistled and grabbed at her. She had turned down towards the river after one managed to seize her wrist and hold on for a couple of strides. Hopefully the woods would provide the peace and quiet she was

searching for, she had thought. Did she make it to the woods? Caster couldn't remember, the bump on her head the only clue as to what had happened next. She almost didn't want to know, she thought, as she looked down, her sweatpants and T-shirt replaced with a bright pink sports bra and tight, black running shorts that barely covered her. The band of the sports bra was too tight and compressed her ribs, making it difficult for her to breathe. She had folded the waistband of her shorts down once, as she often did, ensuring her hips absorbed the elastic pressure, rather than her stomach.

The vibrating stopped, and Caster jumped to her feet, ready to run should the opportunity present itself. Her body swayed for a moment, as if her cell was in the air, and after a thump, stillness. Light flooded onto her bare feet as the maroon blanket rose up around her, and Caster squinted, unaccustomed to the dazzling brightness. Her eyes quickly adjusted and she spun around to take in her surroundings. The crane had already dropped the blanket in the bed of the truck it protruded from, and it was speeding away. Her eyes hastily shifted away from the disappearing truck and landed on the familiar shapes of eyes, noses, and mouths. People! Caster gasped and began to bang her open hands on the glass. Help, she mouthed, knowing no sound would make it out of her cell. The people didn't move. She banged harder, closing her hands into fists. Why weren't they moving? Why wasn't anyone running to get help?

She locked eyes with an older woman, willing her to feel the fear and frustration Caster was feeling, hoping it would break her stillness. But the woman just stared back, tilting her head in innocent interest before touching her companion's arm and pointing at Caster. She couldn't tell what the woman was saying to the person beside her, whom Caster thought might be the woman's daughter. Both of them continued to talk while

gesturing towards Caster for another moment. Then they walked away. Caster noticed the dozen or so other people who had been staring at her had also resumed their business of walking through the street. Her banging became soft, and she pressed her forehead against the glass. For the first time since her capture, Caster cried. Being alone in a cell was one thing, but being alone in a crowd of people was unbearable.

The sun moved across the sky, a gush of wind from above reminding Caster of the slow passage of time. She sat with her back against the opaque wall, feeling the bones of her spine, wishing they were sharp enough to cut a hole in her prison. She studied the buildings around her as they took turns blocking out the sun. People came and went, briefcases and shopping bags in tow, as they stopped only momentarily in front of her before checking their watches or phones and hurrying on their way. It wasn't long before she realized none of them were going to help her, and she sat back, trying to get as far away from their stares as possible, her knees pulled up to her chest.

Caster's stomach growled and she realized she was starving. How long would they keep her here? When would she eat? Were they going to starve her? The stress of the day found its way to her throat, which felt thick and tight. Her eyelids grew heavy, and she dropped her forehead onto her knees and promptly crossed into a dreamless sleep. She didn't even stir when the sun dipped beneath the horizon and her cell lit up like a beacon to guide wanderers towards her.

In the morning, Caster woke with a jolt of remembrance. Her body ached and she was cold. She longed for the maroon blanket and its imagined warmth. As she opened her eyes, she was relieved to see the street was empty. It was still too early for people to be heading to work, she supposed. Stretching her legs out in front of her, Caster pointed

her toes while her eyes refocused on the glass. She froze. There were smears. Like a child's finger painting, the clean, sheer surface was interrupted with streaking fingerprints. She recoiled her legs at the thought of someone watching her sleep, his hands fruitlessly groping at her.

As the sun rose, people began to fill the streets, and Caster was once again slick with the grime of being looked over, up, and down. Was this why she was here? Simply to be looked at? Now a group clustered around her, but far enough away to take all of her in at once. "What do you want?" she said out loud as she stood up, hoping her own voice would comfort her. She watched them watching her, trying to figure it out. Some women were lingering longer than the others. They seemed to be comparing their arms to Caster's, grabbing at the fat that hung below between shoulder and elbow where Caster had solid triceps. She noticed now that all of the women were much heavier than her. Her left hand unconsciously travelled to her right arm and she mirrored the women's movements, feeling her own hard muscles without realizing it. Both hands moved to her bare stomach where she felt the firm bumps of her abdominals, as the women's hands grabbed onto the rounded rolls that hung over their pants. The women took turns pointing at Caster and then comparing each other, sometimes even pinching at one another.

Caster felt faint and wondered again when and how she would get food. The rumble in her stomach grew louder. She imagined what these women had had for breakfast, tasting jealousy as she pictured a beautiful spread of fruit and pastries. Her jealousy twisted into anger as they continued to just stand there, staring. "Get me some food," she meant to yell, but it came out more as a whimper and tears gathered in her eyes.

For the first time she noticed a young girl with the women. The girl must have been around six years old. She clung to her mother's arm, but paid no attention to what the women were saying or doing. Her eyes didn't stray from Caster's face, and as Caster returned her gaze, she spotted within the girl something no one else in the crowd possessed – a look of empathy. What Caster would have done for one of the grown women to look at her that way, for what could this child do to help her? The little girl's hand twitched and she lifted it upwards towards Caster. Caster touched the glass and for a moment didn't feel completely alone. The two continued, as if trying to read each other's thoughts, until the group of women began to disperse and the little girl was pulled along by her mother. She yanked hard against her mother's grasp, looking back at Caster, not wanting to leave her alone. Caster's heart went out to the girl, and without thinking, she gave her a wink.

At that moment, Caster heard what sounded like a Xerox machine. She spun around to the fake snow wall and gasped at the sight in front of her. The mystery opening had produced a sort of tabletop upon which sat a small bowl of blueberries. It wasn't the extravagant spread she had pictured earlier, but it was the first bit of food she had seen in days. She instinctively scooped up a handful and shoved them in her mouth, their sweet wetness the only thing she was conscious of. Gulping them down, Caster grabbed another handful and filled her mouth again, rejoicing for just a moment at the sensation of puffed out cheeks that tingled with bittersweet. The bowl was empty now, and with the excitement over, Caster slowly slid down one of the walls to the floor, her mouth still watering as she licked her fingers. With glazed over eyes, she tried to process the new information. They were going to feed her. That was good. Right? She relaxed slightly,

only to tighten a moment later as a new thought crossed her mind. What if it was poison? She had wolfed it down without a thought. How foolish! She reflected on her senselessness and immediately grew aware of every sensation in her body. Was she getting sleepy? Were those cramps? A tightening throat? She peered out at her audience, which had thinned, wondering if they would see her die. Is that why she was here, for some sick form of entertainment?

The table slid abruptly back into its slot, and Caster attempted to quiet the thoughts of impending death. She remembered the little girl being dragged away by her mother and looked in the direction she had gone, yearning to be seen again, rather than merely stared at. The wink, she remembered, and thought how peculiar it was that just as she had connected with the girl, the food slot had opened. Was it coincidence? Feeling as if she was on the verge of figuring out even a small piece of her dreadful situation, Caster jumped to her feet and scanned the small crowd that stood in a semicircle around her glass cell. Her eyes landed on a short, round man with glasses, and she waited for his eyes to finish travelling up her body to meet her gaze. She winked. The food slot opened again, this time producing bread and cheese.

Caster let out a high-pitched shriek and brought her hands up to the sides of her face in surprise, her eyes darting back and forth between the food and the man with glasses, who now fiddled with his tie. She felt energized for the first time since her capture, as some clarity made space in her mind. She would figure this out. Taking the bread and cheese off of the plate, she waited for the table to retreat back into the slot. When it did, she found another person in the crowd, and this time instead of winking, she smiled. It felt awful and forced, and she dropped the charade as she swung around to see

the table reappear with a piece of chocolate cake, garnished with fresh strawberries.

Caster let out a deep breath and crossed her arms. So they wanted her to interact with the crowd. She was there to be looked at, she thought in amazement. But why? What was the point?

Caster sat down once again, crossed her legs, and began to eat the bread and cheese, deciding now it wasn't poison. It was excellent, and the cake was even better, moist as the strawberries it was paired with. Her stomach full, she leaned against one of the walls and allowed herself to drift off to sleep. When she woke it was dark outside, and she realized that her cell was alight, but how or where the light came from, she wasn't sure. Caster marveled at the technology that kept her captive, while trying to resist the feeling of being watched. She stood to stretch her legs and could see her reflection in the glass. Scanning herself up and down out of boredom, she rose up onto her toes to watch her prominent calf muscles bulge, flexed her abdominals, and then turned to witness the curve of her backside. This is what they saw, she thought, and she continued doing calf raises, her reflection looking back at her, providing some company.

The next day Caster experimented with her audience, flashing smiles, waving, and even blowing kisses. With each gesture the food slot opened, and she was rewarded with something savory. Her crowd seemed larger, and she thought that must please whoever was holding her captive. She felt a sense of power in knowing how to get food, but her imprisonment was not easily forgotten. Her body was starting to ache constantly from being cramped up. She longed to run and let her legs extend out in front of her and propel her forwards. At night when her cell illuminated, she stood again and looked at herself, wondering what the people outside thought of her.

Days and weeks passed. Caster learned how to put on a show to get the best food. She got inside her audience's heads to learn what they wanted. In turn, she played demure, she flirted, she smiled sweetly. Sometimes she was sexy, sometimes she was cute, sometimes she was naughty. Always she was surprised at how well she could be what they wanted. She began to feel empty in the late evenings when there was rarely anyone around to watch her. It was like she didn't exist anymore. Relief would wash over her every night when her cell lit up and she could see her reflection once more.

She learned to look forward to the things that she was given, for it was more than just food now. She stood in cushioned running shoes that felt like floating on a cloud. Each day, a fresh outfit for her to wear appeared on the table, always workout clothes and always trendy. Sweet-smelling dry soaps and moisturizing cream gave her skin a soft glow. Waxing strips helped keep her smooth and hairless. Lip balm gave her a sparkling smile. Everything that came into her cell for her to use or wear bore the same symbol, two semi-circles side-by-side. She hadn't time to wonder what it meant, but noticed those in her crowd were often carrying shopping bags that were branded with these same shapes, and they sometimes wore clothes just like the ones Caster wore. She also noticed that her regulars were beginning to look more like her. The women who once pinched each other's fat were growing slimmer and slimmer, their stomach rolls turned to hardened abdominals just like Caster's.

One night, while tracing the outline of her curves on the glass, something beyond her reflection caught her eye. It was too massive to be a person and its stealthy gait certainly wasn't human. She pressed her forehead to the glass and saw to her astonishment that her visitor had four legs. Caster's mouth fell agape, as she watched an

enormous bear march unhurriedly in front of her cell, back and forth, back and forth. It's thick, brown coat quivered with each step it took, the light from her cell gleaming off of each fiber. She cupped her hands around the outside of her face and pressed the edge of each hand against the glass, blocking out the light so she could see more clearly. The bear stood out because of its size, but more so because it didn't belong in the city amidst concrete and discarded coffee cups. It stopped and faced her, staring at her for a moment or forever – Caster forgot herself in its eyes. Then it was gone.

The next night Caster turned side to side before her reflection, imagining what poses her audience might like. She often fantasized about herself through their eyes now, from the other side of the glass. Putting her hand on her hip, she thought just for a second that the spot her hand landed on felt rather soft. The thought was interrupted by movement beyond the light. The bear was back. Pressing against the glass, Caster watched it in fascination again. What was it doing here, she wondered, as it meandered back and forth in front of her cell before finally stopping to stare at her.

The bear continued to return each night, and Caster's fascination with the animal turned to annoyance. Its pace seemed to quicken by the day, and as weeks passed, it became agitated, pacing hastily about her with its eyes darting about. "What?" Caster would say out loud in a perturbed voice before huffing in frustration.

During this time, Caster became increasingly aware of how soft her body was becoming. Her muscles had atrophied and gravity was pulling at her once perky curves. She yanked at the gummy parts, rolling the fat between her fingers in disbelief. This didn't feel like her body, she thought, as she hardly recognized the reflection in the glass at night. One evening she was struck by an alarming question. What would they do with

her if she was no longer worthy of being looked at? The thought of freedom hadn't crossed her mind for almost a week now; she had been too busy waxing and modeling clothes. Would they free her? What would she do then? It was hard to imagine, she had to admit. What if they just decided to dispose of her, send her wherever the contents of her bathroom drawer ended up? What if they killed her? No, she couldn't get fat. Starting tomorrow, she decided, she would exercise.

The next morning Caster tousled her hair and gave a big stretch before offering a little wave to her fans, many of them donning the double semi-circles. She remembered with a sigh that today she was to begin exercising. After breakfast, she changed into her new outfit that had arrived through the slot – a strappy, neon yellow sports bra with black double semi-circles in the center of the chest and a pair of spandex shorts that had peep holes down each side along her hips. She was used to changing in front of her crowd now, but wondered if they had noticed her newly dimpled thighs. Her attention shifted back to the previous night's uneasiness about her future with fat, and her stomach gave a flutter.

Jogging on the spot, Caster experienced the odd combination of both familiar and novel sensations. In her double semi-circle running shoes, her feet made quick and light touches on the ground, but her legs felt heavy and weak. It wasn't long before she was out of breath and wanted to stop. But she couldn't. What would her audience think? And she would never get her old body back if she quit after a couple of minutes, she reminded herself. Sweat began to form in droplets on the top of Caster's forehead and she imagined how nice it would feel to wipe herself down with the dry soap after. She noticed the thought distracted her from her fatigue, and she let her mind wander further, picturing her

old body and the way her audience looked at her when she was being coy, sensual, or mischievous. Between cramps and glances at her double semi-circle watch, she imagined how she would pose when she was skinny again, her long, toned arms stretched up above her with one arm just slightly lower, an alluring arch in her back that drew the eye to her round buttocks, a delicate bend in her knees which she pointed to the side, bringing her up onto her toes to flex her calves.

She couldn't wait until nighttime so she could look at her reflection and see how her hard work had paid off. Caster sat on the floor of her cell after dinner, tapping her foot with excitement as the sun went down. When the cell lit up she jumped to her feet, noticing the stiffness in her legs, but pushing the thought aside to better concentrate on how she looked. Her shoulders dropped in disappointment. She looked the same, maybe worse, Caster thought. She grabbed at her stomach where she could now pinch almost an entire inch of fat, and she was disgusted with herself and this body she was trapped in. "Go away!" she yelled to the bear, who had just arrived and was looking at her as if it had something to say.

The following day, Caster added squats to her workout, and the day after that, single-leg squats, and after that, calf raises, then standing push-ups against the glass since there wasn't quite room to lay prostrate on the ground, then crunches, then glute raises. She forced herself to work until she was faint with hunger, all the while thinking of how she hated this body she was in. She began to leave parts of her meals, and hunger became coexistent with guilt that washed over her perceived fatness. She despised these workouts, and each night she despised her reflection. Her irritation towards the bear grew.

On a rainy day when her crowd was particularly thin, Caster simply couldn't do it. She couldn't force herself to get up and do the jogging and the squats and the other things she hated. She sat the entire day, eating whatever they gave her, and sinking deeper and deeper into her own self-loathing. Sometimes these feelings lasted for days before Caster could snap herself out of them and return to her workout routine. Other times, Caster would stick with her routine for weeks and finally begin to see results in her reflection at night. I look good, she would think to herself, and decide that she deserved to take the next day or two off from working out.

It was well into Fall now, and although Caster could see no trees from her cell, bright yellow leaves blustered along the sidewalk. Sometimes they would blow up against her glass, pinned there by a strong gust, and she would bend down and stare at them, outlining the pointed ridges with her finger. In these moments her mind would travel outside of the cell and she would remember the feel of a fresh breeze on her skin, the smells of grass and dirt in her nostrils, and the warm embrace of her mother's arms. Stop, she would warn herself, shaking her head to rid it of the memories she knew would cause her to fall to pieces. It was too much to dream of freedom.

The bear's pacing grew frantic at night. Caster tried to ignore it, yielding to the awareness that she would never understand what it wanted or why it was there. Then one night, something magical happened. Caster was feeling particularly depressed about her reflection and thinking about how her regulars were starting to look even better than she did. She sat with her back against the fake snow wall, hugging her knees that were pulled up to her chest. The bear hurried back and forth in front of her, but Caster's eyes were closed, her forehead resting on her knees. A thunderous bang caused her eyes to fly open

and she jumped to a squatting position, having never felt her cell shake as it just had. Giant paws with long, sharp nails hit the glass again, and Caster screamed. For the first time she was afraid of the bear. She looked wildly about her, trying to see into the darkness. Was anyone there to help her?

Then it happened. A flash, a feeling, a vision, a thought. She couldn't tell which, but was aware of a stunning desire to run, to let her feet hit a dirt path, to be free. The bear continued to bang away on her glass, and with each booming contact, there was a new knowledge within Caster. The bear was here for her. She was no longer afraid. It wanted her to run. She was compelled to bang on the glass as well. For the first time in weeks she let herself feel the need to get out. She let the glass have it, and months of built up fury that she had denied suddenly poured out of her. Caster banged and kicked and roared with the bear until she was spent, and she sunk to the floor, her chest heaving. The bear stopped too. It dropped back down to all fours, looked Caster deep in the eyes, and walked away.

Caster felt lighter than she had since her capture when she went to sleep that night. Something inside of her had been awakened and there was a profound sense of knowing that tingled in her being. When she woke the following day, Caster put her plan in motion. She did her jogging and her squats, and she didn't hate it. The burning fury inside of her sent energy coursing through her veins. She would get stronger, she thought. She would get out. That night and those that followed unfolded in a similar manner. The bear's touch on the glass ignited an impression within Caster, something she couldn't entirely comprehend, but felt like being flung down to the thick end of a spectrum of worth, love, passion, and pain. The pain she felt in her hands that pounded,

night after night, on the glass, she and the bear partaking in what felt like both a ritual and a plot. She would get stronger. She would get out. Muscles burning, sweat running down her back, her spirit returning, growing and gaining, push-ups, squats, glute raises. She would get stronger. She would get out.

The glass cracked. Caster's eyes opened wide and she stepped back, her breath coming quickly. They had done it. After weeks of pounding, she and the bear had hit the right spot at the right moment. The bear remained upright and stepped backwards into the darkness. Smaller cracks were spreading away from the main one, and without a moment of doubt, Caster drew her right foot up and kicked her heel into the glass as hard as she could. It shattered, and the sound stunned Caster, who had heard nothing, but her own voice for months. Her hands instinctively covered her ears, as she moved towards the missing wall. Reaching out her hand, as if in disbelief, she touched freedom and stepped through.

Caster felt everything all at once and almost choked on the night air. There wasn't time to adjust to her new surroundings; she was being pulled towards the bear by an unseen force. It wanted her to run, she knew, and without a conscious thought, her legs were moving. They moved so fast that her arms could barely keep up the pace that she and the bear held as they sprinted side by side. The wind blew through her hair, her eyes grew wide as buildings flew by, and Caster became aware of the sensation that this was the most alive she had ever felt. Something deep inside her was growing and bursting forth into her limbs, an infinite energy that made her weightless and tingling all over. She reached the edge of the city and slowed to a trot, turning to her running companion to

rejoice in her freedom. But the bear was gone. Caster looked about for a moment, then began her run again, entering the woods. She was free.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Reflections, Conclusions, and Future Directions

I began this dissertation what feels like a lifetime ago. In our interview, Rebecca described living one year in one body and the next year in another body. I appreciate her meaning. My fit and muscular frame from my days of prospectus writing is long gone, wasted away amidst the suffocating burden sometimes born of the simple task of writing. I suppose writing isn't actually all that simple. Putting pencil to paper, or the less literary fingers to keyboard, is quickly complicated as I take on the lives of others and theorize the intermingling of our lived experiences in what Schwandt (2000) refers to as practical-moral knowledge.

I conclude this work with a discussion on quality criteria that has guided my research and writing process. I offer a reflexive summary of chapters, in which I discuss emerging insights relative to the topic at hand as well as to my use of narrative inquiry. Lastly, I describe possible future directions for research on the relationship between gender and physical activity.

Quality Criteria

Quality criteria for qualitative research have become contested terrain within the postmodern age, in which relativism is often perceived to cull researchers into a trap that prevents any meaningful judgment. How are we to judge the goodness of research if there can be no appeal to a foundation that exists outside of our socially constructed knowledge (Smith & Deemer, 2000)? How are we to know what social science and qualitative research is *supposed* to look like? Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a set of

criteria, including credibility, transferability, and confirmability, which parallel criteria of the hard sciences towards achieving trustworthiness. Sparkes and Smith (2009) highlight a major issue with such a closed-ended list, namely that new and experimental forms of qualitative research often do not fit within these constraints and would, therefore, be judged poorly. Such a parallel and foundationalist perspective on validity limits the possibilities for research and for what can be known and how it can be known. Bochner (2000) states, “Sometimes I feel that criteria are the very means we ourselves created to contain our desire for freedom and experience, a way of limiting our own possibilities and stifling our creative energy” (p.267).

What are researchers to do then in assessing the quality of their work and the work of others? Schwandt (1996) states:

We must learn to live with uncertainty, with the absence of final vindications, without the hope of solutions in the form of epistemological guarantees. Contingency, fallibilism, dialogue, and deliberation mark our way of being in the world. But these ontological conditions are not the equivalent to eternal ambiguity, the lack of commitment, the inability to act in the face of uncertainty (p. 59).

I return to my own epistemological and ontological positions, knowing that, for me, one of the most important criterions for good research is a sense of coherence throughout each level of knowledge construction or negotiation, from philosophical underpinnings to study methods to my role as researcher and representation of findings (Ballinger, 2006). I have great appreciation for the difficulty in achieving such coherence.

Throughout this dissertation, I have edged the blurry line between philosophical hermeneutics and social constructionism. While both positions maintain that meaning is not fixed, social constructionism holds that there is no one truth and knowledge is

constructed (Shwandt, 2000). This view is troublesome for feminist researchers because it allows readers to object to feminist knowledge on the basis of taste. This is the reason I have skirted the term ‘postmodernism’ throughout these chapters even though I recognize my often-unconventional writing style can be characterized as such.

Philosophical hermeneutics, on the other hand, aligns well with Harding’s (1991) strong objectivity, Haraway’s (1998) situated knowledges, and Lieblich et al’s (1998) position within narrative inquiry, all of which I have drawn upon within this dissertation. It also supports performative and poetic representations because of its emphasis on dialogue, communication, and openness.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) have since altered their position in a move towards a relativist ontology, opposing any universal set of criteria. Smith and Deemer (2000) state, “The lists we bring to judgment are and can only be open-ended in that we have the permanent capacity to add items to and subtract items from the lists...” (p. 888). Criteria must be dynamic and changing as new ways of doing qualitative research emerge and new exemplars are brought to bare meaning on entire fields of research, such as Sydner’s (1998) “A history of synchronized swimming.” Bochner (2000) and Ellis (2000) provide two examples of such ‘lists.’ Reluctant to even use the word ‘criteria,’ Bochner (2000) sets out his process for reading narratives of the self:

First, I look for abundant, concrete detail; concern not only for the commonplace, even trivial routines of everyday life, but also for the flesh and blood emotions of people coping with life’s contingencies; not only facts but also feelings. Second, I am attracted to structurally complex narratives, stories told in a temporal framework that rotates between past and present reflecting the nonlinear process of memory work—the curve of time. Third, I almost always make a judgment about the author’s emotional credibility, vul-

nerability, and honesty. I expect the author to dig at his or her actions and underneath them, displaying the self on the page, taking a measure of life's limitations, of the cultural scripts that resist transformation, of contradictory feelings, ambivalence, and layers of subjectivity, squeezing comedy out of life's tragedies. Fourth, I prefer narratives that express a tale of two selves; a believable journey from who I was to who I am, a life course reimagined or transformed by crisis. Fifth, I hold the author to a demanding standard of ethical self-consciousness. I want the writer to show concern for how other people who are part of the teller's story are portrayed, for the kind of person one becomes in telling one's story, and to provide a space for the listener's becoming, and for the moral commitments and convictions that underlie the story. Sixth, and finally, I want a story that moves me, my heart and belly as well as my head; I want a story that doesn't just refer to subjective life, but instead acts it out in ways that show me what life feels like now and what it can mean (p.270).

In my autoethnography in Chapter Three, and also throughout the insertion of myself as researcher and subject within other chapters, I have been mindful of these means of writing. I have attended to my own “flesh and blood emotions” (Bochner, 2000, p. 270) as both a (novice) researcher, treading out into the ‘field’ for the first time, and a subject, who lives and breathes in the world I am studying and who is constantly working to subvert technologies of dominance. I expressed the crushing weight of dichotomous thought in Chapter Two, the suffocation of an incomplete theorization of my lived body juxtaposed with the freedom of body movement in Chapter Three, the weight of my participants storied lives in Chapter Four, the questioning of myself as the sixth participant in Chapter Five, and the feeling of ‘hitting the wall’ in Chapter Six. In this chapter, I reflect on some of the feelings and emotions of the dissertation writing experience, as well as the bodily ramifications of ‘long distance writing.’

According to Sparkes (1999), the body is often either absent in social science research or treated in a biomedical manner symptomatic of a larger issue in (male) stream social science research that fails to acknowledge the embodied nature of knowing. He cautions against Frank's (1990) claim that bodies are back 'in' for two reasons: first, bodies have always maintained a presence in feminist research and were never 'out' for all social science researchers, and second, as Davis (1997) states, "the body may be back, but the new body theory is just as masculinist and disembodied as it ever was" (p. 14). Throughout this dissertation, I have let loose my natural inclination to think and write through my body as researcher and subject. My desire to write the body into my text likely comes from my sporting influenced bodily awareness that has carried over from my athlete self into the construction of my academic self.

This desire is cohesive with a feminist standpoint; yet, it is the feminist ethic of care for my participants that created challenges in bringing my participants' bodies into my writing. The greatest of these challenges was maintaining the anonymity of my participants. In Chapters Four and Five, my impulse was to describe the scenes of the interviews, with the subjects front and center. I not only wanted you, the reader, to be able to picture the women with whom you were dialoguing – I was also drawn to my memory of the women's physical presence and how it added another layer of understanding to their life histories. To take in their bodies and contextualize them within culture and history is to share their meaning and perhaps even their agency through their acts of resistance to feminine ideals, but I worried endlessly of 'giving them away.' Secondly, I was cognizant of the risk of objectifying my participants by describing their shapes and sizes, wondering if my own appreciation for all body types could overcome

the social stigma attached to descriptive words, such as large, round, fleshy. Would my descriptions create an opportunity for Othering by the reader? Would my participants feel hurt or offended in reading such a description? Would it be hypocritical for me to express a value in body function over appearance and then use writing space to describe my participants' appearances? Could I go beyond a description of appearance and portray feeling, movement, and sensation? I did indeed attempt to portray such bodily experiences, and this endeavor was challenging because the women did not often speak of how their body's felt.

Returning to Bochner's (2000) criteria, I have attended to time as one of the dimensions of the three-dimensional narrative space, specifically in Chapter Four, but also throughout the dissertation, as I moved between representations of my own and my participants' past and present. By including future years in the Life Book Activity, I also allowed narratives to move from past and present into the future and back again, representing the non-linear curve of time in the construction of self.

As researcher, I have intentionally made myself vulnerable in numerous ways in order to ensure transparency and honesty regarding my own foreunderstandings and research process. I continuously used writing as inquiry, foregoing the well-planned outlines for papers that used to guide my writing, and instead relied on the iterative process of the hermeneutic circle to take me in and out of my life experience, my writing, the data, the literature, and the theories and philosophical underpinnings of this study. This constant movement allowed me to maintain an openness to new ideas as they presented themselves. I also began this dissertation with positioning myself epistemologically, followed by an autoethnography that openly shared my own lived

experience with the topic of this dissertation and how my journey from athlete to academic led me to this topic. Throughout the chapters that followed, I was present as researcher, owning the interpretation of data in order to subvert the “conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway, 2003, p. 26). Within the text of this dissertation, I am easily locatable.

Bochner (2000) calls for a “tale of two selves” (p. 270), an expression of growth from the person one used to be to the one she is now. In Chapter Two I describe my struggle with identity after retiring from athletics, as well as my journey of resistance to dominant exercise discourses for women. While not wanting to force my participants’ life histories into the aforementioned ‘two selves,’ I did indeed find the process of reflection and storytelling led each of them to establish past selves, present selves, and future selves, whose relationships to physical activity have shifted and changed between selves.

Bochner’s (2000) fifth criterion, to hold oneself to an ethical self-consciousness, has guided me throughout the process of this study and its representation. I believe by inserting myself into the text throughout this dissertation I have been responsible in my knowledge claims as situated and have opened up space for alternative interpretations of the data. Throughout this dissertation, I have experienced great concern for my participants and those that are included in their life histories. I have withheld judgment, occupying a space of empathy, while also being honest regarding my perceptions as researcher. I have worked to ‘show rather than tell’ throughout the previous chapters, using story, poetry, and metaphor to draw the reader into a genuine dialogue, to make her think, feel, and perhaps to be moved to action.

Ellis (2000) also describes her thought process in critiquing alternative texts, which includes asking herself numerous questions regarding what she has learned from the text, whether or not the plot feels balanced and authentic, does the author show rather than tell, is the story complex and nuanced to ring true to life, are literary techniques used to enhance the story, has writing been used as a form of inquiry, and does the work promote dialogue or incite a desire to take action. I have addressed each of these in the previous paragraphs, excluding the first question, which I turn to now.

Summary and Emerging Insights

I began this project with a genuine interest in understanding the role gender plays in women's life experiences of physical activity and the ways these experiences are remembered and storied. At the end of this project, I believe narrative inquiry was the appropriate methodological choice. In Chapter One I drew attention to the lack of qualitative health promotion research, whose focus on epidemiology has prevented a useful understanding of the meaning within existent relationships between gender and health. My use of narrative inquiry in this dissertation has allowed me the freedom and creativity to explore my participants' life histories in numerous ways – individually and collectively, structurally and thematically – in order to honour the layered, complex, and sometimes contradictory experiences and stories brought forward regarding women's physical activity. Narrative inquiry also allowed me the space to be with my participants in their stories, to think with them, and to be honest and transparent regarding my role as researcher. It provided an avenue to show rather than tell through performative and artistic texts that are accessible and can draw the reader into a mind-body connection

with my participants and myself. This connection was described in Chapter Two through the use of philosophical hermeneutics and a discussion on the embodied nature of performative texts, setting the tone for the following chapters and situating myself within a feminist framework.

In Chapter Three I explored, through autoethnography, my own lived body experiences in attempting to resist dominant social discourses on women's physical activity. As part of the larger dissertation and guided by philosophical hermeneutics, I viewed my own lived experiences and historical situatedness, not as liabilities or things to be managed, but as necessary elements of understanding or *Verstehen*. I began my study with an autoethnography in order to explore and engage with my own prejudices, bringing them into awareness within my foreunderstanding, my personal and social meaning traditions. I found women's exercise discourses to be rather oppressive and drew on Foucault's theory of governmentality to express my feelings of constraint. An opportunity unique to autoethnography presented itself, as I found that theorizing my experiences within a Foucauldian framework did not allow me to tell the whole story, and I took on a phenomenological stance to express the sensations of body movement I feel through physical activity. I continued in later chapters to insert myself into the text, sharing the ways my experiences are both similar and different from my participants' experiences, highlighting my openness to new understandings and the *I-thou* dialogue that persisted amongst my participants and I and eventually their interview transcripts and these chapters.

In Chapter Four I introduced the main focus of my study and its participants through varied forms of representation of a holistic analysis that maintained each

participant's individuality and uniqueness. I constructed narratives for each woman that expressed the plot of her life history, and I reflected on my own presence within the narrative constructions. Rebecca 'ran the bases' of fitness consumerism, jumping on fitness bandwagons in an attempt to restructure her body after a car accident and then to meet standards of ideal beauty. Kate moved within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, emphasizing the social aspect of basketball from childhood and into her imagined future, and the spaces in which she feels at home within physical activity. Sam negotiated a divided self, as she constructed an identity within a body she is fighting against. Janet moved across the world to leave behind her past of disordered eating. Gabriella moved across stocks of knowledge, as she reflected on her own attitudes towards physical activity and exercise.

A prime concern for me during the writing of this chapter and those that followed was "How should I *be* toward these people I am studying" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 203)? I am not one to embrace a so-called objective distance between researcher and subject. This distance, when emphasized, risks reinforcing the power differential between researcher and subject as well as the appropriateness of irresponsible knowledge claims from nowhere, a contemplation Denzin (1994) refers to as "the cold, analytic, abstract, voyeuristic, disciplinary gaze of Foucault's panopticon" (p. 64). Instead, I sought a close relationship with my participants, referring to them as 'my ladies' to emphasize their realness and the historical situatedness of our interviews, always keeping my participants in mind as potential readers of my writing.

I should say, rather, I sought a close relationship with their texts or interview transcripts. During the interviews themselves, I conducted myself in a more traditional

manner, not giving much of myself emotionally in the moment. Our exchanges were less a dialogue and more a one-sided interview. I am cognizant of how this relationship may have reinforced the hierarchical gap that often exists between interviewers and interviewees (Ellis & Berger, 2003), and how sharing more of myself may have encouraged my participants to peel back yet another layer of themselves and reveal even more than they did (Bergen, 1993 in Ellis Berger). I look forward in future research to exploring the dynamics of more interactive interviewing styles.

In Chapter Five, I moved within the data in the opposite direction from the previous chapter. This time, I looked across participants to find a common structure of physical activity throughout their lives. The periods included play, sport competition, an obsession with weight, finding the gym and looking elsewhere for more fulfilling forms of physical activity, and physically active future visions of motherhood. Part Two of this chapter described emergent themes shared by participants. These included a hierarchy of activities in which gym workouts and running are the most valued; the conflation of thinness with health and fitness through a triangle of exercise, diet, and appearance; the social influence on physical activity of friends and teammates, significant others, and parents. Implications for health promoters include the importance of sport participation and physical literacy for young girls in order for them to engage in sport as adults, the opportunities in Physical Education to improve physical literacy by shifting the mentality from sports to games or from sports to a more inclusive definition of physical activity, the potential for mass media health promotion campaigns to move beyond education and risk prevention and shift the popular vision of what a physically active woman looks like and what kinds of activities she can participate in.

In my attempts to maintain an I-thou dialogue between my text and readers, I used the findings from my study, coupled with my own lived body experiences, to create a fictional story that is meant to bring to life the relationship between physical activity and the objectification of women's bodies. I used metaphor to portray the desire to meet male-defined ideal beauty standards that all of my participants and I have experienced. Drawing on the connections between consumerism, appearance-based motivations for exercise, and mental health, I describe a woman who becomes trapped by social expectations for women and their propensity to cause women to gaze at themselves from outside of their bodies.

Conclusions

Philosophical hermeneutics, which guided this study, is an interpretive project – less something to be applied to a structure or policy, and more concerned with increasing understanding and awareness through meaning and dialogue (Schwandt, 2000). Still, there are conclusions to be drawn that I think can be meaningful within a health promotion framework, and the direction forward I will suggest aligns well with philosophical hermeneutics. The risk of using poetic or performative texts and playing with interpretive authority, according to Tierney and Lincoln (1997), is that study findings may not be translated into policy. Within performative texts, the interaction between reader and text allows for the acknowledgement of the messiness and complexity of lived experience, as well as the acknowledgment of many layers of interpretation, whether they have been applied to the data or left for the reader to apply his own interpretation. While such texts are meant to draw readers into shared

experience, those experiences that are described are not meant to be representative of entire groups or populations. What can we know from a study such as the one described in this dissertation? Keeping in mind that the following conclusions only apply directly to my participants, they nonetheless have the potential to be translated into health promotion policy when placed within the broader research puzzle of femininity and the body in physical activity where they reflect meaning wider social trends. The findings from this dissertation are meaningful because they provide some context and narrative depth to the existing quantitative, epidemiological studies that demonstrate a relationship between gender and health.

The purpose of this work was twofold: first, to determine if narrative inquiry is a meaningful and productive approach to study the relationship between femininity and physical activity, and secondly, to examine the relationship between femininity and physical activity within women's life histories.

Narrative inquiry and methodological considerations

Narrative inquiry has proved a meaningful approach to study gender as a social determinant of health, and more specifically, femininity as a determinant of women's physical activity. While I struggled in choosing between narrative inquiry and phenomenology, I think narrative was a good fit because of the nature of femininity as socially constructed and the ability to use narrative to explore this social construction. This methodology allowed me access to both the remembered experiences from the women's pasts and how they currently engage with the social world around them, drawing on and resisting social discourses, and 'folding in' the outside in constructions of self.

Narrative inquiry also allowed me the freedom to tackle this topic in numerous ways, including different forms of analysis and representation. This freedom was both a curse and a gift. There is no one way to do narrative inquiry, and I can remember feeling quite overwhelmed in the midst of designing my study, and then again once I had finished transcribing my first interview, by the possibilities for analysis. While I intended to do holistic and categorical analysis based on Lieblich et al's (1998) four quadrants (holistic-structural, holistic-content, categorical-structural, categorical-content), what that actually looked like was left to vague description in the many texts I read. I was also surprised by the amount of data produced through single interviews and by the time it took to transcribe the interviews. This large collection of data led to what felt like an infinite array of possibilities for interpretation. There was so much meaning to be pulled from the transcripts; if I were to do this study again, I would use one or two fewer participants and be more able to focus in on each woman.

I found Polkinghorne's (1995) article provided a direct and practical consideration of narrative analysis based on Bruner's (1986) two modes of thought. Through his description of the movement between story and categories, I could locate myself along this continuum and picture in which direction I was headed. At this point of the dissertation process, I am left with an appreciation for the art within the science of narrative analysis. There are so many micro-decisions that mold and shape a piece of narrative, and I often relied on my gut to tell me which direction to take – always the direction that moved towards an audience.

The gift of freedom in narrative inquiry, as opposed to the curse, was experienced throughout the process of representation. I particularly enjoyed trying out numerous

forms of narrative in Chapter Four, in which each woman's life history was maintained in its uniqueness. I appreciated the opportunity to explore the intricacies of each history's parts and how they fit into the whole. It felt like I was doing my participants justice by preserving their fullness and choosing the form of representation that fit them as individuals. My hope is that each section of Chapter Four represents its participant while also drawing in readers to reflect on their similarities and differences. In Chapter Five, looking across participants for shared structure and themes left somewhat less room for me to show myself in the text. Using this more common approach to narrative inquiry allowed me to gather more general understandings of my participants' life histories, while still locating myself as researcher. Chapter Six was an exciting opportunity to take all that I had learned that is expressed within the previous chapters and present it in story form, putting to use my conceptualization from Chapter Two that performative social science is feminist practice.

Most importantly, my use of narrative has provided meaning and context to the existing knowledge regarding the connection between gender and health, specifically femininity and physical activity. Narrative inquiry requires rich description and for researchers to go in depth into their own lives and/or the lives of others. Diving into the layered and complex experiences of the self and others allows researchers to negotiate the meaning of those experiences in the time and social spaces in which they occurred and in which they are remembered. The line that connects gender to health, when investigated narratively, spikes and jumps as something as decontextualized as a number comes to life, each heart beat a lived moment that adds to our understanding of that

number. Only 14% of Canadian women meet the recommended daily amount of physical activity (Colley et al., 2011). What do the spikes and jumps within that 14% mean?

The relationship between femininity and physical activity

The conclusions drawn here are representative only of my participants, and I make no claim to be able to answer the above question in its completeness. What I present is partial knowledge, a piece of the puzzle.

For my participants, the relationship between femininity and physical activity is, not surprisingly, complex. In deciding to forego, in this study, the sport sociology tradition of focusing on a specific sport or form of physical activity, I gained an understanding of how my participants perceive physical activity. It is at different times 1) something to be enjoyed either alone, or more commonly, with friends; 2) part of mental health maintenance or improvement, part of a happy life; 3) something that one is supposed to do as part of a 'normal' life; 4) something that improves physical appearance through weight loss; and 5) something one should do for her health. Each of these meanings was present within the different periods of the shared life history structure, which moved from play to sport competition, an obsession with weight, finding the gym and looking elsewhere for more fulfilling forms of physical activity, and physically active future visions of motherhood. Often two or more meanings would exist simultaneously, and sometimes this caused contradictions. For example, the women frequently described moving beyond thinking of physical activity as a means to weight loss and towards something to be enjoyed or a part of a happy life, only to circle back to their desire to lose weight.

Nonetheless, they demonstrated a certain level of critical awareness, some more than others, regarding social pressures to be active in specific ways and to embody ideal beauty, these pressures reportedly coming mostly from social media. Despite recognizing the pressure to look a certain way, the women did not critique gendered beauty ideals or the general objectification of women in our society. They did not express a feminist consciousness or an awareness of how they or other women might be oppressed by power relationships that work to dominate women. They did not describe themselves as agents of change or as resisting common social practices, but as dealing with individual issues. Usually they located problems or issues, such as their perceived failures to meet appearance based standards, inside of themselves, rather than in the social construction of such standards. There was awareness of the journey each woman had been on, and of each woman's perception of physical activity as having changed throughout her life. This awareness was not enough to cull the link between physical activity and ideal beauty that each woman recognized, at least to some degree, as harmful to her mental health, confidence, or physical activity practices. Despite placing the highest value on running and gym workouts, each woman has been drawn back to organized sport for reasons beyond a desire to lose weight. Perhaps their greatest critical awareness resides within their embodied knowing – they know they are physically capable and that they fit in or belong in athletic spaces.

Number four – something that improves physical appearance through weight loss – is the meaning that was most predominantly attached to the women's struggles to be physically active. The major finding from this study is that the intention or motivation driving participation in an activity has a strong influence on the experience of that

activity. For the women in this study, being physically active for the purpose of losing weight was not enjoyable, led to a lack of motivation, and was not sustainable. It created a disembodied self, chained to a metaphorical bear. Being physically active for training, competition, and/or fun was enjoyable and sustainable; the metaphorical bear disappeared, leaving a whole, fulfilled self. Being physically active out of a fear of fat is a different experience than being physically active with a focus on function and fun.

Considering the conflation of health/fitness and thinness expressed by my participants, health promoters working within health education might contemplate a shift in the messaging from risk prevention to increased critical awareness – a new kind of mass-media educational campaign that disrupts commonly held beliefs regarding motivations for women to be physically active, what a fit body looks like, and what activities women are capable of participating in. Messaging that is inclusive of all body types and all activity types could present physical activity as an opportunity, something to be gained, rather than something one ‘should’ do to avoid illness and obesity.

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that my suggestion regarding a way forward for health education aligns with philosophical hermeneutics, despite hermeneutics being more concerned with understanding and awareness than application to structure or policy. The new style of mass-media campaign I suggest aligns with philosophical hermeneutics because it relies on communication and understanding through what would likely be a slow, but meaningful shift in social attitudes and dominant discourses towards women and their bodies. My suggested campaign has less to do with educating the public regarding biological health and more to do with instigating a critical eye in others regarding women’s worth to themselves as individuals.

An effective mass-media campaign that creates critical awareness in its viewers would likely make use of the poetic and performative possibilities that exist to draw the viewer into a genuine *I-thou* dialogue, to have emotions evoked, to be moved to change. Individuals are already using social media to disrupt gender norms via YouTube, draw attention to everyday sexism on Twitter, and instigate a body positive movement through Instagram. For example, there are numerous YouTube videos in which gender roles are reversed, leading to comedic outcomes because of the obvious ridiculousness in directing common female judgments towards men; the hashtags #everydaysexism #missrepresentation and #askhermore are just a few that draw attention to women's marginalization, the latter being credited with the Hollywood red carpet shift away from "Who are you wearing?" to arguably more meaningful, project/work-related inquiries for female movie stars; plus size Instagrammers are providing proof that larger bodies can and are often physically active, capable of self-acceptance, and deserving of a place within the fashion industry.

Health promoters working within health education might use the power of social media to address gender as a social determinant of health and participate more meaningfully in the women's movement. Sport England's "This Girl Can" media campaign takes on this challenge through inclusive messaging, catchy music, and even the spoken word of Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman." One video, and even one campaign, will not be enough. Female objectifying practices are so embedded in our culture, we require an all-out assault on the current messaging that relies on and reinforces oppressive dominant discourses and that reaches us through television, movies, magazines, social media, billboards, family traditions, workplace practices, and

everyday social interactions. These messages tell women they are not good enough as they are, that they must buy into, literally, current fitness trends and body ideals. Physical activity, for my participants and likely many other women, was and is at times a disciplinary practice. Instigating a critical awareness through participation in the feminist movement via mass-media campaigns may be a way forward for health promoters.

Future Directions

Narrative inquiry is a useful methodology to understand the meanings of the relationship between gender and health. More qualitative studies are needed to create a balanced and more complete account of how women experience physical activity at different points in their lives. Future studies can continue to add pieces to this puzzle. The current study had five participants, and action within the field of health promotion cannot take place based solely on the life history narratives of five women. More studies are required to create a collective consciousness and to be inclusive of the various experiences and storytelling of women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, ages, sexualities, abilities, geographies, education levels, and socioeconomic statuses. The five participants within this dissertation are rather homogenous regarding the aforementioned demographics, but by acknowledging the messiness, complexity, and often-contradictory nature of lived experience, I have abstractly underscored this dissertation with moments of intersectionality. For example, I demonstrate how Gabriella's views on exercise shift between stocks of knowledge as she moves between 'docile' female and highly educated, professional chiropractor; I 'flirt' with disability through an awareness of both the marginalization of disabled athletes and the transgressive performances of such athletes

gained through teaching a disability sport and recreation course; I draw a connection between Rebecca's rehabilitation after her car accident with her continued desire to 'fix' her body; I highlight the ways the heterosexual relationships the participants have with their significant others influences their physical activity behaviour and body acceptance or lack thereof, such as Sam's relationship with her trainer/husband; I draw attention to the sheltered and safe physical spaces – the court and cul de sac – that shape both Kate's and my identity construction, which we are economically and racially privileged to experience; I acknowledge the early support to participate in sport and the relatively high level of physical literacy shared by participants, which has likely influenced their sense of belonging as adults in typically male dominated, sporting spaces.

Future studies should include women from more diverse backgrounds and continue to explore how race, class, sexuality, and disability intersect with femininity to create varied and complex life experiences. In Chapter One I relayed Broom and Warin's (2011) question: who can afford to be obese? Broom and Warin (2011) explain that because obesity in women leads to social and economic sanctions, women of high socioeconomic status cannot afford to be obese. More research is required with participants of varied socioeconomic backgrounds to understand the role socioeconomic status plays in the type and level of physical activity women participate in. My participants mentioned time to be physically active as a factor in relation to motherhood, but it was not a driving force for physical inactivity. How would participants with less leisure time throughout their lives, less parental support as children, and fewer safe play spaces describe their life histories of physical activity? How would participants with no

sporting background, a sedentary lifestyle, and a lack of physical literacy describe their life histories of physical activity?

The current study initially aimed to have 10 participants in order to include women on the full spectrum of physical activity from completely sedentary to extremely active. This intention was derived from the idea that choosing not to or being unable to participate in physical activity is also a valid experience worth exploring. As I began to collect data, it became clear to me that 10 participants in a narrative inquiry is too many and would not have been manageable. In fact, I found five participants was one or two too many, and future studies may wish to limit the number of participants based on the enormous amount of data collected within narrative studies. Limiting the number of participants might open up the possibility to include further data collection methods, such as participant observation, which is often used in narrative inquiry in conjunction with interviews.

All five of my participants described similar levels of physical activity as well as shared pasts as athletes. The homogeneity of participants in this sense is likely due to the topic of the study; perhaps women who are sedentary are less interested in participating in a study on physical activity, or perhaps they feel their inactivity makes them inappropriate subjects. Future projects might take participant recruitment a step further than I did by using more formal gatekeepers, such as family doctors, who might pass along study information to patients who are sedentary. It would indeed be worthwhile to explore the life histories of individuals who are sedentary in order to better understand what their current perceptions of physical activity are and how they came to be as such. It would also be worthwhile to investigate the role social influencers have on lesbian

women, particularly because some of my participants' desires to lose weight through physical activity was influenced by their relationships with men. How do women in same-sex relationships experience the male gaze, if at all, and how might the association between physical activity and appearance be different and/or the same?

Likewise, future studies should include men in order to better understand how they embody masculinities and what affect that embodiment has on physical activity participation. The current study did not originate from the unequal physical activity participation rates between men and women. While women in Canada are less physically active than their male counterparts, the difference is not staggering, and the reality is both women and men are less physically active than optimal health outcomes requires (See Colley et al., 2011). My interest in men and masculinities continues to grow, but the current study focused on women and femininity because it is the topic I am most interested in, and I thought dealing with both sexes and genders in one study might lead to a theoretical overload. As I reflect on the study now, I think having both men and women as participants would have been tremendously interesting. As hegemonic masculinity expands to include a muscular, 'ripped' body, I wonder how men are negotiating their physical activity behaviours. I am also curious regarding the role health promotion might play in addressing the risk-taking behaviour, such as steroid use, contact sports, and adrenaline sports (for example, free climbing and cliff jumping) that are often driven by the rational technologies of hegemonic masculinity.

Future Self

A bear jumped on my back when I began my PhD. I became disembodied, even as I emphasized the importance of the body in my work. The bear had come before, but

never for this long. It was heavy, bulging with comparisons to others and my own expectations – who, how, what I *should* be, but wasn't. I should be confident, I should be happy, I should be generous and caring. But I was empty. Nothing to give. These things I used to be were hollowed out of my body and ingested by the hungry bear that crushed me a little bit more with every year that passed by as I stayed in the same mental place. I was no longer myself, detached from the present moment and trapped in my head, without a body to bring me back to some sense of knowing who I was. I could not exercise my mind out of fear. Movement forward had to be out of acceptance and love. The bear is back inside me. I am confident. I am happy. I am generous and caring. I am done my dissertation. I am moving forward.

The song is over

I'm just starting to dance

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Information

Western University



Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Storied Bodies in Motion and Stillness: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into the Meaning of Women's Exercise

Researcher: Shellie McParland, Dr. Don Morrow, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study examining women's perceptions and experiences of exercise and physical activity. The purpose of this study is: (1) to create a space where women can share their experiences of exercise and physical activity and the meanings they attach to these experiences; (2) to compare the exercise stories of women who currently meet the daily recommended amount of physical activity and women who do not currently meet this recommendation; (3) to explore the possibilities behind current health and exercise trends for women by grounding health promotion research in lived experience.

Study Background

The primary objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of what exercise means to women, where these meanings come from, and how they influence participation. This will be done through an exploration of the stories women tell about exercise, their bodies, and their places within our current health and fitness culture. This information has the potential to inform future health promotion policy and initiatives.

What is involved?

You will be asked to take part in two separate interviews, scheduled at a time and location of your choosing. How long the interviews last will depend on how much you have to say, and you can choose to end the interview at any time. Interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. A summary of each interview will be sent to you via e-mail to ensure the information collected is accurate.

What are the Participation Requirements?

Participants must be female; aged 25-35; living in London, Ontario; able to speak, read, and understand English; have a desire to share their experiences of exercise and physical activity. Participants with varied current levels of physical activity are welcome, including those who are sedentary.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

All of the information collected during the study will remain completely confidential. Your name or any information that discloses your identity will not be used in any publications that result from this study. Only the researcher involved in this study will have access to information that could reveal your identity. Audio recordings and transcription texts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet inside a locked office in Elborn College on the Western University campus. Any electronic files will be kept on a password-protected computer. If you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

What are the risks and benefits of participating in this study?

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. You may withdraw from the study at any time. There are no direct benefits of participation in this study.

Study Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Shellie McParland.

APPENDIX B: Consent Form

WESTERN UNIVERSITY



CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Storied Bodies in Motion and Stillness: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into the Meaning of Women's Exercise

Researchers: Shellie McParland, PhD candidate, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, and Dr. Don Morrow, School of Kinesiology

I have received information on this research study and agree to participate. I acknowledge that participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

APPENDIX C: Demographic Information

WESTERN UNIVERSITY



Demographic Information Sheet

Full name: _____

Age: _____

Self-identified race/ethnicity: _____

Highest level of education achieved: _____

Degree(s) (if post-secondary school attended): _____

Occupation: _____

Income: _____

Marital status: _____

Number of children: _____

Please describe your current exercise and physical activity during an average week:

APPENDIX D: Western University Ethics Board Approval Letter



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Donald Morrow
Department & Institution: Health Sciences/Kinesiology, Western University

NMREB File Number: 106129
Study Title: Storied Bodies in Stillness and Motion: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into the Meaning of Women's Exercise and Physical Activity
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: February 26, 2015
NMREB Expiry Date: February 25, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Appendix C: Life Book Activity Sheet	2014/12/01
Other	Appendix F: Contact for Results	2014/12/01
Other	Appendix B Demographic Information Sheet	2015/01/08
Recruitment Items	Appendix D: Invitation to Participate Email Script	2015/01/08
Letter of Information & Consent	Appendix E: Letter of Information and Consent	2015/01/08
Instruments	Appendix G: Interview Guide - Life Story Activity	2015/01/08
Instruments	Appendix H: Interview Guide - 2nd interview	2015/01/08
Recruitment Items	Appendix I: Letter to Gatekeepers	2015/01/08
Western University Protocol		2015/02/02

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Erika Basile ebasile@uwo.ca	Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	Mina Mekhail mmekhail@uwo.ca	Vikki Tran vikki.tran@uwo.ca
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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

APPENDIX E: Western University Ethics Board Continued

Approval Letter 1



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Annual Continuing Ethics Approval Notice**

Date: January 20, 2016

Principal Investigator: Dr. Donald Morrow

Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Kinesiology, Western University

NMREB File Number: 106129

Study Title: Storied Bodies in Stillness and Motion: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into the Meaning of Women's Exercise and Physical Activity

Sponsor:

NMREB Renewal Due Date & NMREB Expiry Date:

Renewal Due -2017/01/31

Expiry Date -2017/02/25

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed the Continuing Ethics Review (CER) form and is re-issuing approval for the above noted study.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), Part 4 of the Natural Health Product Regulations, the Ontario Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA, 1990), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information: Erika Basile ___ Nicole Kamiki ___ Grace Kelly ___ Mina Mekhari ___ Vikki Tran ___

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files

APPENDIX F: Western University Ethics Board Continued

Approval Letter 2



Research Ethics

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board HSREB Annual Continuing Ethics Approval Notice

Date: January 13, 2017
Principal Investigator: Dr. Donald Morrow
Department & Institution: Health Sciences\Kinesiology, Western University

Review Type: Delegated
HSREB File Number: 106129
Study Title: Storied Bodies in Stillness and Motion: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into the Meaning of Women's Exercise and Physical Activity

HSREB Renewal Due Date & HSREB Expiry Date:
 Renewal Due -2018/01/31
 Expiry Date -2018/02/25

The Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board (HSREB) has reviewed the Continuing Ethics Review (CER) Form and is re-issuing approval for the above noted study.

The Western University HSREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the International Conference on Harmonization of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use Guideline for Good Clinical Practice (ICH E6 R1), the Ontario Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA, 1990), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), Part 4 of the Natural Health Product Regulations, Health Canada Medical Device Regulations and Part C, Division 5, of the Food and Drug Regulations of Health Canada.

Members of the HSREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The HSREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000940.

Ethics Officer: Erika Basile ___ Katelyn Harris ___ Nicole Kaniki ___ Grace Kelly ___ Vikki Tran ___ Karen Gopaul

APPENDIX G: Life Book Activity

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Curriculum Vitae
Shellie I. McParland

Section 1: Education

Western University Canada

- 2011-2017 **Doctor of Philosophy**
 Health Promotion, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences
 Advisor: Dr. Don Morrow
- 2009-2011 **Master of Arts, Sport History and Coaching**
 School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Health Sciences
 Sport History Thesis title: *Mirrored Reflections on Femininity: An Autoethnography in Track and Field, Basketball, and Figure Skating*
 Sport History Advisor: Dr. Don Morrow
 Coaching Advisor: Dr. LaRose
- 2007-2008 **Bachelor of Education**
 Junior-Intermediate
 Faculty of Education
- 2003-2007 **Bachelor of Arts, Honours Kinesiology**
 School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Health Sciences

University of Copenhagen

- Summer 2011 **Copenhagen International Summer School**
 Philosophy Doctorate program with highlighted focus: “Sport and Movement Cultures – Developments and Practices in a Globalized World: Historical, Sociological, Psychological, and Pedagogical Approaches,” Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences

Distinctions, Honours, and Scholarships

- Ontario Graduate Scholarship, Western University, May 2014-April 2015, \$15 000.
- Ontario Graduate Scholarship, Western University, May 2013-April 2014, \$15 000.
- “Recognition of Achievement” in teaching, Faculty of Health Sciences, UWO (2010).
- Bob Gage Athletic Leadership Scholarship: \$1200 (2007).
- Academic All-Canadian (2005/2006, 2006/2007, 2007/2008).
- Student-Athlete (2003-2008). Western Mustangs Track and Field co-captain and co-Most Valuable Player award winner, Ontario University Athletics (OUA) All-Star, Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) All-Canadian, OUA gold medalist, CIS silver medalist.

Section 2: Publications and Presentations

Articles in Refereed Journal Publications:

McParland, Shellie. “The Gender Game: Rewriting the Rules of Basketball through Autoethnography.” *Sport History Review* 44, no. 1 (2013): 25-37.

McParland, Shellie. “Autoethnography: Forging a New Direction in Feminist Sport History.” *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 3 (2012): 473-479.

Book Reviews in Refereed Journals:

Jennifer Homans. *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet*. New York: Random House, 2010. Review accepted for publication in *Journal of Sport History* 40, no. 1 (2013): 178-179.

Lisa Bier. *Fighting the Current: The Rise of American Women’s Swimming, 1870-1926*. London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011. *Journal of Sport History* 40, no. 1 (2013): 164-165.

Other Publications

McParland, Shellie. “Canada,” in *Inspirational Women: Making a Difference in Physical Education, Sport, and Dance*, International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Women

Editor: *Tales from a Not-So-Quiet Town and Other Musings* by Terrence E. McParland

Oral Conference Presentations:

McParland, Shellie. “Storied Bodies in Motion and Stillness: A Critical Narrative Analysis of Women’s Exercise and Physical Activity,” *50th Annual International Sociology of Sport Association World Congress: The Sociological Lens and the Well-Being of Sport*. Hosted by Paris Descartes University, Paris, France. June 9-12, 2015.

McParland, Shellie. “Fusions of Dichotomous Horizons: Performative Social Science as Feminist Practice,” *31st Annual Qualitative Analysis Conference*. Hosted by Brescia University College, London, Ontario. June 25-27, 2014.

McParland, Shellie. Young Researchers’ Panel, Closing Ceremonies, *17th Quadrennial World Congress of International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women*. Hosted by International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women, Havana, Cuba. April 10-13, 2013.

McParland, Shellie. “Navigating ‘Normalcy’ and Performing Gender: An Exploration of Women’s Lived Body Experiences with Exercise,” *17th Quadrennial World Congress of International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women*.

Hosted by International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women, Havana, Cuba. April 10-13, 2013.

McParland, Shellie. “Navigating ‘Normalcy’ and Performing Gender: An Exploration of Women’s Lived Body Experiences with Physical Activity,” *Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Research Forum 2013: Sowing Seeds of Ideas for Fruitful Trees*. Hosted by Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Western University. February 6, 2013.

McParland, Shellie. “The Gender Game: Rewriting the Rules of Basketball through Autoethnography,” *40th Annual North American Society for Sport History Conference*. Hosted by North American Society for Sport History, Berkeley, California. June 1-4, 2012.

McParland, Shellie. “Women, The Lived Body Experience, and Exercise: A Phenomenological Study,” *Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Research Forum: Brewing Research, Steeped in Ideas*. Hosted by Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Western University. February 8, 2012.

McParland, Shellie. “Gazing into the Sexualized Bodies of Women in Sport: An Autoethnography” accepted for presentation, but had to withdraw from *North American Society for the Sociology of Sport 2011 Conference: Revolutionizing Sporting Bodies: Technologies in Practice*. Hosted by North American Society for Sociology of Sport, Minneapolis, Minnesota. November 2-5, 2011.

McParland, Shellie. “Mirrored Reflections on Femininity: An Autoethnography in Track and Field, Basketball, and Figure Skating,” *Sport and Movement Cultures – Developments and Practices in a Globalised World. Historical, Sociological, Psychological, and Pedagogical Approaches*. Hosted by Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. August 21-26, 2011.

McParland, Shellie. “Gazing Into the Lived Body of Women in Sport: An Autoethnography,” *9th Annual MacIntosh Sociology of Sport Day Conference*. Hosted by the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. January 22, 2011.

McParland, Shellie. “Reflecting on Reflexivity and my Reflection: An Autoethnographic Journey through Femininity in Canadian Sport History” *Women Making Change Conference 2010*. Hosted by the Institute for Women in Leadership at Brescia University College, London, Ontario. March 12, 2010.

McParland, Shellie. Master of Arts Thesis, *Mirrored Reflections on Femininity: An Autoethnography in Track and Field, Basketball, and Figure Skating*, examines the history of women’s sport participation from a feminist perspective, using autoethnography as methodology to incorporate personal narrative, evocative memory work, and dialogue with feminist literature to explore the ways gender inequalities from the past are embodied by present day athletes.

Section 3: Teaching and Service

- Instructor at King’s University College:**
 2017 IS 2252A: Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods – Interdisciplinary Studies
 2016-2017 DS 2023A: Disability Sport and Recreation - Disability Studies
- Instructor at Brescia University College:**
 2017 DOL 1035A: Leadership for Foods and Nutrition – Dimensions of Leadership
- Instructor at Western University Canada:**
 2010 KIN 2217R: Track and Field - School of Kinesiology
- Co-Instructor at King’s University College:**
 2016 DS 2211B: Disability, Sport, and Recreation - Disability Studies
 2015 DS 2211B: Disability, Art, Sport, and Leisure - Disability Studies
- Co-Instructor at Brescia University College:**
 2014 DOL 1000B: Primer on Leadership - Dimensions of Leadership
 2013/2014 DOL 1031: Exploring Leadership - Dimensions of Leadership
- Research Assistant at University of British Columbia:**
 2012/2013 Go Girls Program Evaluation, School of Kinesiology
- Teaching Assistant at Western University:**
 2012 HS 9602: Qualitative Research Methods - Health and Rehab Sciences
 2012 HS 2610G: Introduction to Ethics and Health - Faculty of Health Sciences
 2011 KIN 2263G: Canadian Sport History - School of Kinesiology
 2009 KIN 4482A: Perceptual-Motor Performance - School of Kinesiology
- Teaching Assistant at King’s University College:**
 2011/2012 SOC 2245: Medical Sociology
- Junior/Intermediate Teacher at Holy Angel’s School:**
 2008/2009 Superior North Catholic District School Board

Invited Lectures:

- Title: “Disability, Sport, and Youth in Canada”
 Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Diversity and the Canadian Family, Brescia University College. Instructor: Dr. Nikki Edwards. Winter 2016. Undergraduate class size: 30

- Title: "Team Leadership and Listening to Out-Group Members"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Dimensions of Leadership, 1035A, Leadership for Foods and Nutrition, Brescia University College. Instructor: Dr. Megan Popovic. Fall 2015. Undergraduate class size: 60
- Title: "The Student Leadership Challenge"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Dimensions of Leadership, 1000B, Brescia University College. Instructor: Dr. Megan Popovic. Winter 2014. Undergraduate class size: 30 students.
- Title: "Women in Leadership"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Dimensions of Leadership, 1000B, Brescia University College. Instructor: Dr. Megan Popovic. Fall 2014. Undergraduate class size: 30 students.
- Title: "Women in Leadership"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Dimensions of Leadership, 1035A, Brescia University College. Instructor: Dr. Megan Popovic. Fall 2014. Undergraduate class size: 40 students.
- Title: "Co-Active Leadership: The Potential in Partnerships"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Dimensions of Leadership, 1000B, Brescia University College. Instructor: Dr. Megan Popovic. Winter 2013. Undergraduate class size: 35 students.
- Title: "Writing Well at the Graduate Level"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Qualitative Research Methods in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, HS 9602. Instructor: Dr. Debbie Rudman. Fall 2012. Graduate class size: 20 students.
- Title: "Moving Forward with Your Research: A Panel Discussion"
Occasion: Guest panel discussion for Introduction to Research Methods in Health Sciences, HS 9516A. Instructor: Dr. Suzanne Huot. Fall 2012. Graduate class size: 5 students.
- Title: "What Does 'Participation' Mean in Participatory Action Research?"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Qualitative Research Methods in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, HS 9602. Instructor: Dr. Debbie Rudman. Fall 2012. Graduate class size: 20 students.
- Title: "Sport and Physical Activity: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class"
Occasion: Guest Lecturer for Medical Sociology, SOC 2245. Instructor: Dr. Courtney Newnham. Fall 2012. Undergraduate class size: 20 students.
- Title: "Reflexivity and Researcher Voice: Examining the Role of Researcher in Qualitative Inquiry"

- Occasion: Guest lecturer for Qualitative Research Methods in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, HS 9602. Instructor: Dr. Debbie Rudman. Fall 2012. Graduate class size: 20 students.
- Title: “Social Determinants of Health: Class, Race, Ethnicity”
- Occasion: Guest lecturer for Medical Sociology, SOC 2245. Instructor: Dr. Courtney Newnham. Winter 2012. Undergraduate class size: 50 students.
- Title: “Society, Sport, and Health”
- Occasion: Guest lecturer for Social Determinants of Health, 1002A. Instructor: Dr. Megan Popovic. Summer 2011. Undergraduate class size: 30 students.

University Service:

Reviewer <i>Qualitative Health Research</i>	2017
Disability Symposium Panel Member Disability Studies, King’s University College	2017
Assistant Coach Western Mustangs Men’s and Women’s Track And Field Teams	2010-2016
Research Forum Planning Committee Member Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Western University	2011/2012
Research Forum Abstract Review Committee Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Western University	2011/2012
Academic Mentorship Program Committee Western Mustangs Athletics	2010/2011
Academic Mentor Western Mustangs Athletics	2010/2011
Guest Coach Western Mustangs Men’s and Women’s Rugby	2010/2011

Professional Affiliations:

Society for Disability Studies	2017 - present
International Sociology of Sport Association	2015 - present
International Association for Sport and Physical Education for Girls and Women	2013 - present
Canadian Obesity Network	2013
North American Society for Sociology of Sport	2009-2011
North American Society for Sport History	2009-2012

